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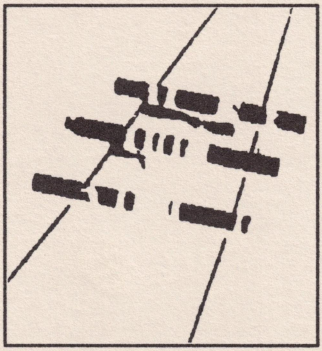

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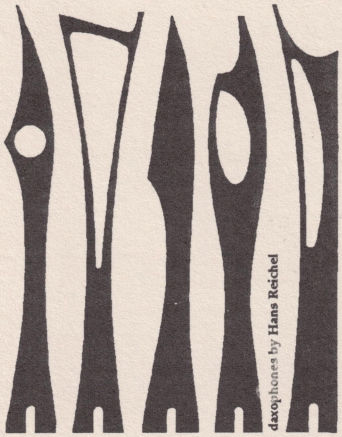

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Welcome to Issue 23. It's a brave person who attempts a history of the developments in freely improvised music, an area notorious for under-publicised or neglected 'schools' and individuals, whose belated 'discovery' tends to throw the seemingly best laid plans out of kilter. Evan Parker offers a "History" in the sleevenotes to his recent **Synergetics — Phonomanie III** (Leo Records CD LR 239/240), comprising five "waves" spanning the period 1945 to the present. The "third wave" (c. 1975-80) includes "musicians from a rock background typically from the so-called 'art rock' tendency." Putting the rock contribution as late as 1975 (10 years after the start of the "second wave" which includes Evan) is a factual error given that a number of groups had begun using freely improvised strategies as early as the late 1960s/ early 1970s. In America, one thinks of The Mothers Of Invention and Captain Beefheart & His Magic Band; in Europe, one thinks of Soft Machine, Can, Faust, Tangerine Dream, Henry Cow, Third Ear Band, King Crimson, Van der Graaf Generator, etc. In other words, rock musicians' contributions to improv are still largely overlooked and undervalued; historians of improv still prefer to look in 'more obvious' places for the pioneering spirit. In this issue of **Rubberneck** you will find an interview with Bill Bruford (of King Crimson) and a piece written by David Jackson (of Van der Graaf). Their inclusion here is an attempt to put things right. Keep in touch!

Chris Blackford/December 1996

23

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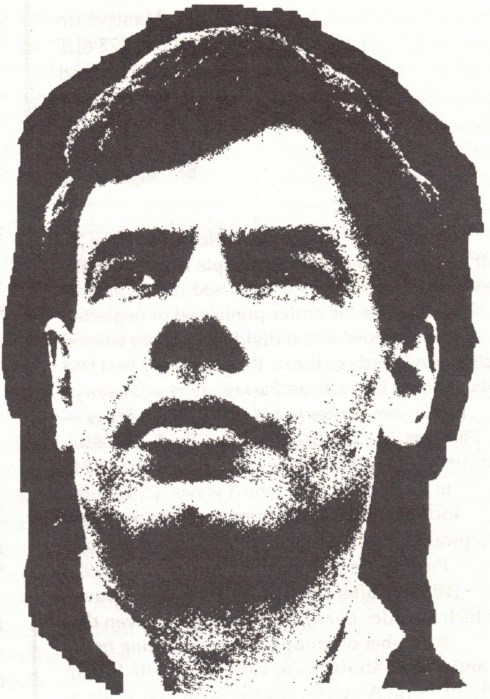
Image
King Crimson logo, page 13 (© DGM)

If you find mistakes in this magazine, please remember that they are there for a purpose. We try to publish something for everyone, and some people are always looking for mistakes.

the improvisor's guide to King Crimson



Distinctive and uncompromising, King Crimson have been at the forefront of experimental rock for three decades, and improvisation at the heart of their ever-changing soundworld. **Bill Bruford**, virtuoso percussionist with the group for nearly 25 years, discusses this much neglected and frequently misunderstood area of their work.

Interview: **Chris Blackford**

Could you begin by providing some background on what you consider to have been your basic motivations and ambitions as you started out on your career in music.

BB I grew up really as a jazz drummer with everything that that implied in the mid-60s. I loved the whole ethos of jazz and the whole idea that jazz drummers found a voice on their instrument, refined it and honed it to the point that it didn't really sound like anybody else, and you had a clear identity on that instrument. But in the mid-60s in London jazz was in pretty much terminal not-good-shape and rock seemed infinitely more interesting. I defy any red-blooded male age 17 or 18 in London in the mid-late 60s who was aware of jazz or rock to have played jazz. Hendrix was beginning to happen and there was Keith Emerson and all sorts of other exciting things. Mitch Mitchell was doing Elvin Jones with Hendrix and I think I wanted to do Max Roach with anybody who would come along.

What came along was a group called Yes which we didn't really know was going to be a rock group, or at least I didn't, and I determinedly tried to play swing cymbal-time through large portions of the band's first album which didn't work out terribly well. But that's to show you: (a) how young everybody was; (b) how naive everybody was; and (c) how the distinction between jazz and rock was

all a bit blurred. And blurring it further seemed to be the order of the day.

You joined King Crimson in the summer of 1972, at a time when Yes were enjoying considerable commercial success. Yet, you quit them for King Crimson which was then undergoing a major personnel shake-up, Robert Fripp being the only surviving member from the original 1969 line-up. What prompted you to join King Crimson; and what kind of musical challenges did you hope or expect to face with this new group that weren't possible within the context of Yes?

"There was never enough material around, and when there's not enough material around necessity becomes the mother of invention and improvisation is something one looks to in moments of panic."

BB There were two groups in my life. One was Yes which I joined and the other one was King Crimson which I wanted to be in as soon as I heard **In The Court Of The Crimson King** (1969). It seemed that that record was altogether more mysterious, more abstract, less upfront, and appealed to my sense of improvisation and inquiry, much more than Yes did. Yes seemed to be a vocal group with instrumental backing whereas King Crimson was an instrumental group with the occasional vocal. I felt that Yes discussed and talked about everything much too much, and it was committee decision on every bass note, and I wanted to be in what I perceived was a sort of grown-up band where people didn't talk so much and, more in a jazz style, were able to improvise. Yes was never able to do that. Yes could never have played a 12-bar blues successfully together because we were from such rampantly different backgrounds. But in the Crimson camp, it seemed from where I sat in Yes, that was altogether the more 'manly' group where one would be able to do all sorts of timbral and improvising things on the instrument without having to get permission.

*In the booklet that accompanies the 1973-74 live 4CD set, **The Great Deceiver**, Robert Fripp draws attention to King Crimson's use of structured and free improvisation. If we could look at the structured variety first, which he describes as "the continual reinvention of existing material". Could you explain how the group went about reinventing these composed pieces in a live situation; what sorts of freedoms you allowed yourselves in relation to the songs and instrumentals?*

BB It's commonly thought that musicians in King Crimson talk about things like structured and free improvisation over breakfast. To my knowledge over the last 10 years, and probably before that, we hardly ever talked about music at all in any direct way, so the idea that we were actually using something called 'structured improvisation' is news to me. Free improvisation I quite understood. Structured improvisation? I don't know, I think that meant trying to get the tunes right. Seriously, some of them are quite difficult to play. 'Fracture' was quite tricky to play, and often in the circumstances which Robert seems to have detailed, like lousy monitoring, very loud audiences, not being able to hear half the people on stage, and complicated tunes, just getting them right was something of an achievement. If you throw into that the idea that in my tiny head I was something of a jazz player and felt like I had a bit of an obligation to improvise through most of my written parts (*laughs*), then I suppose we'd be getting close to something called structured improvisation. There were, of course, genuinely open areas in many of the tunes. '21st Century Schizoid Man', for example, had a classically open area and did wander off into strange territories quite a bit, and was bookended by the written material. So that's a way of improvising that is not, strictly speaking, free.

The freely improvised pieces seem to me to be the most audacious and advanced statements made by the 1972-74 line-ups. In the first place, live free improvisation was not the norm among British rock groups, and still isn't, and certainly not foremost among the expectations

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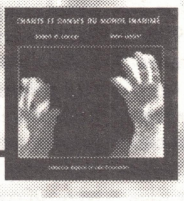

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1973-74 KC, L to R: David Cross, John Wetton, Robert Fripp, Bill Bruford (photo: Island Records)

of rock audiences, either. To my knowledge, Third Ear Band and Henry Cow were about the only other British rock groups using improv, around this time, as an integral part of their work. Secondly, none of the members of King Crimson, except Jamie Muir who had been a member of Music Improvisation Company, would have been regarded as 'recognised improvisors'. How did this decision to freely improvise arise?

BB A lot of the group's improvising was born out of necessity. The group's compositions, on the whole, came very slowly and were excruciatingly difficult. It was a bit like drawing blood from a lettuce. I remember many hours of sitting in rehearsal rooms in Kingston staring at my feet, watching out of the corner of my eye the bass player staring at his feet, whilst silence hummed and we tried desperately to think of what might come next in the next opus we were writing. There was never enough material around, and when there's not enough material around necessity becomes the mother of invention and improvisation is something one looks to in moments of panic. But having improvised you listen back to the results and think, "Yeah, there's really something to this business." If you can just get some live editing in there and, of course, self-editing is one of the most important techniques in improvising, then you can really achieve some sounds, notes, chords and clusters that otherwise would be really unachievable, I think, even for somebody with infinite patience who knew all the musicians' likes, dislikes and characteristics and was able to write that on manuscript.

Improvising can throw up stuff that can't be got by any other way. A lot of the gigs were recorded live, and we weren't at all above erasing applause tracks and making sure there was no sign of an audience on the tapes and passing that off as studio recorded material, because record companies of the day would pay a lower royalty rate for music they somehow thought was inferior if it was recorded live. Indeed, in the current King Crimson improvisation is the origin for most of the music, and the music is then often topped and

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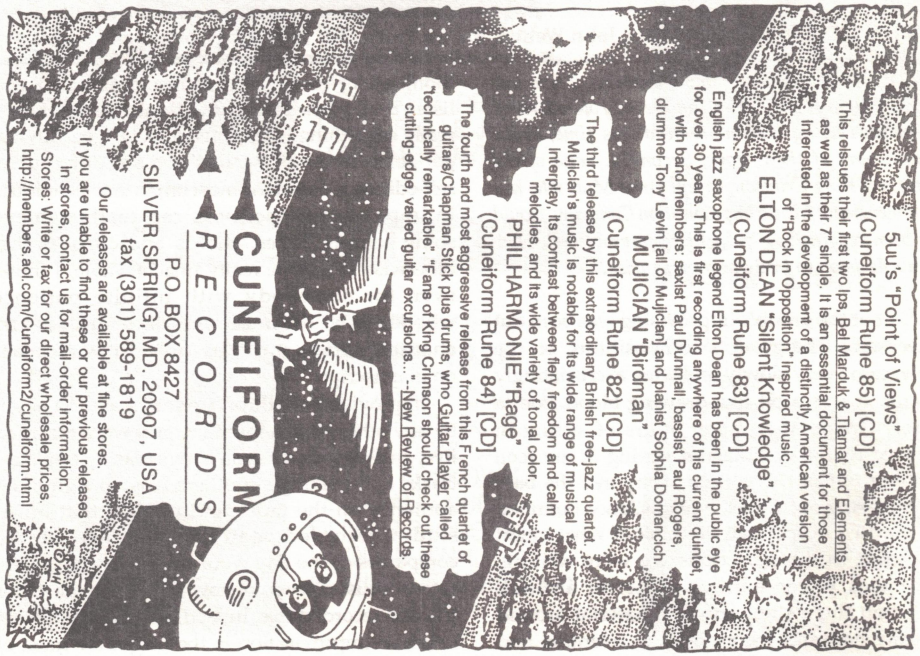
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tailed, given a lyric, and has its hair brushed for recording at a later date.

It always irritates me when I read some rock journalist casually describing these freely improvised pieces as "spontaneous jams". To me, 'jamming' is something rock or jazz musicians do in rehearsal, a sort of informal loosening-up often based on riffs; a means-to-an-end activity rather than a fully self-sufficient approach to music-making. KC improvisations were always more disciplined than jamming. For example, one perceives a flexible attitude to conventional rock instrumentation roles: this idea of frontline and supporting instruments is overturned as the Bruford/Wetton rhythm section often dissolves, leaving percussion and bass guitar free to produce fragmentary rhythmic or non-rhythmic statements — John Wetton's sparing melodic lines and textural stabs, your use of cymbals and small percussive sounds to produce nuances of colour and texture. Likewise, Robert Fripp's guitar and David Cross' violin are free to work outside conventional, frontline melodic roles. Even a mellotron could take centre-stage. Other things such as an imaginative awareness of space, dynamics, and the notion that a musician is free to drop in and out of an improvisation, or even to remain silent, as you do on 'Trio' from ***Starless And Bible Black*** (1974).

Was there any discussion about what could be achieved or attempted during a free improvisation, any post-performance discussion about the improvised pieces you'd played during a particular gig. And did the group see its own improvising in relation to what was happening in the so-called 'established British improvising community' of groups like Spontaneous Music Ensemble and AMM, etc.

BB The improvising such as it was, was 'European' because it hardly involved the famous old blues pentatonic scale. Still to this day Americans will tell us how European it all sounds, and it's just because we didn't go off on the Eric Clapton pentatonic scale which was the classic blues route, which people like Cream had done to death. So if you didn't use that material, instantly you sounded like, as you say, the SME or AMM. Just sheer wads of sound became more interesting, in particular the nature of the sound, the timbre of it. But I don't think we sat around and thought of ourselves in relation to any other particular improvising organisation, although there was definitely a feeling that there was European improvisation to be made as distinct from American improvisation, as it were, or Afro-blues improvisation, the famous jamming. Yes, I agree with your distinction here. A jam is, on the whole, something to be avoided at all costs, it seems to be endlessly repetitive with nothing much going on. Your description of the sorts of things going on in the improvisations is admirable, and they were great fun to do and could be really really interesting.

"The improvising such as it was, was 'European' because it hardly involved the famous old blues pentatonic scale. Still to this day Americans will tell us how European it all sounds, and it's just because we didn't go off on the Eric Clapton pentatonic scale which was the classic blues route, which people like Cream had done to death."

There wasn't much discussion. Everybody, particularly being English, finds it hard to talk about this stuff, but I think unhappiness and happiness of the group members surfaced through the music. I think it's fair to say, and it's been said by Robert many times, that the rhythm section was a bit bombastic. Probably we were over forceful, usually for good reason because there's two or three thousand people sitting out there making a lot of noise and generally wanting something. Being fairly immature we were probably, as a rhythm section, too ready to provide something. That may well have left our poor and dear violinist/mellotron player David Cross in unhappy straits. Robert, on the whole, was able to cope with the sheer weight of the rhythm section. I think probably it's quite true that some people listen

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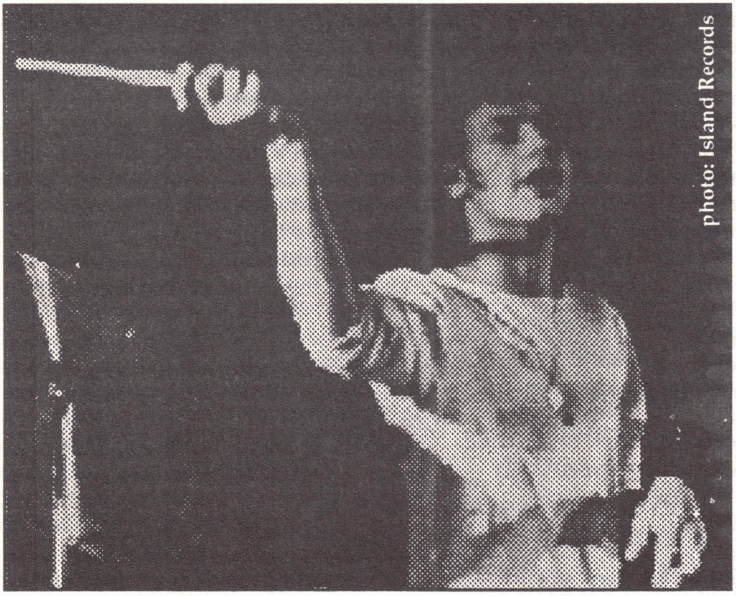

photo: Island Records

more than others and I was probably guilty of not listening. There's a degree of culpability around, perhaps I didn't have as much imagination as I could have done. But there you go, that's the nature of improvising. We're all still friends so it can't have been that bad.

Post-performance discussion on these things tends to be more or less hopeless, people are so subjective at that time, particularly in the dressing room after the show. And then after a few drinks nobody can remember anything anyway. Post-performance discussion was usually to be avoided at most costs. You risked the group breaking up. King Crimson was one of those groups you were never sure it would be there at breakfast the next morning. On the whole the idea of a post-performance discussion with Robert is, shall we say, unwise.

Could we turn now to the early 80s King Crimson line-up of yourself, Robert Fripp, Adrian Belew and Tony Levin. I suppose the first thing one notices about ***Discipline*** *(1981) and particularly* ***Beat*** *(1982) and* ***Three Of A Perfect Pair*** *(1984) is the abundance of songs, and that some of these, like 'Matte Kudasai', 'Heartbeat' and 'Sleepless', sound like sophisticated pop songs. Adrian Belew's voice has that light but edgy quality reminiscent of a new wave singer like David Byrne; quite a contrast to the hard rock tendencies of John Wetton. Is it fair to say that for the 80s line-up, experimenting with popular styles was as much a priority as composing complex avant-rock instrumentals like 'Discipline', 'Industry' and 'Larks' Tongues In Aspic Part III'?*

BB Yes, that's fair to say. The way these groups tend to happen is that Robert appears with an idea, a sort of master idea which will spawn other versions of that central idea. In the 1980s band a lot of it had to do with this sort of heterophonic interweaving of two single-note lines from the guitars. Belew and Fripp wouldn't play chords as such, they would play interweaving single-note lines and that would be the kind of aerated string-vest sound to the guitar playing, really quite a light texture. Some of this came from the idea of Balinese music and endless clattering of sixteenth notes.

There was an interesting book around at the time called *Music, Society, Education* by Christopher Small, and he quotes composer Colin McPhee who evidently was an authority on the music of Bali.

McPhee says: "The primary utilitarian nature of this Balinese music emphasizes a conception rather different from ours, that the music might be something which is..." this is the important bit, "...not to be listened to itself. Never will it become personal or contain emotion. At a ceremony its presence is as necessary as incense, flowers, offerings. Here a state of music is required for a certain time, nothing else."

Robert was keen on this idea, particularly in the tune 'Discipline', that nothing apparently should happen. But, of course, there was very elaborate and clever interweaving and if you cared

to listen deeply then you would see it in there. If you listened superficially it would appear as though almost nothing was happening in the tune. That particular style of guitar playing gave rise to lots of sort of sub-songs such as 'Frame By Frame' and 'Neal And Jack And Me'. Certain percussion was needed too, he wanted me to get away from standard rock drumming and try to open the different timbres of the kit, which came across well in 'Industry'. Of course, we had new tools with which to do this. There was the Chapman Stick, the 10-string instrument that Tony Levin used, electronic drums had just been invented, there were Roland guitar synthesizers.

You may remember around the early 80s it was quite an exciting time. People like Peter Gabriel, Laurie Anderson and Talking Heads and a bit of a New York loft scene were tickling the American Top 50. Even King Crimson got close to that in album terms. World Music hadn't been invented, Fripp & Eno had done bits of stuff and people were beginning to think about ambient music, and music that wasn't listened to as a great showing-off statement in the grand western tradition. So King Crimson was pulled off the shelf to hopefully do useful work in that department.

"It's always a mild irritant that the group is perennially lumped with Yes and Genesis as part of the prog rock movement of the late 60s... When Crimson stopped in 1974, the band turned its back on all that and reappeared in 1980 with a wholly different way of going about making music to its previous incarnation."

The 90s King Crimson "double trio" line-up of Fripp/Bruford/Belew/Levin plus new members, Warr guitarist Trey Gunn and percussionist Pat Mastelotto, has brought KC free improv back with a vengeance on the recent album ***THRaKaTTaK*** *(1996). It's often a dense, non-idiomatic soundworld that the group creates using a considerable amount of new electronic technology. In fact, with four guitarists all seemingly capable of producing expansive polyphonic sounds, and two percussionists who also use electronic percussion, it's difficult to identify the contributions of individual musicians (your marimba playing being the most easily identifiable). This, and the fact that there isn't any soloing as such; what comes across is a strong collective approach to improvisation, very much a group music, where individual virtuosity is held in check.*

BB Yes, if the 80s King Crimson had been light and aerated in texture, then the 90s one is pretty much the opposite. Of course, I came along to the beginning of the 90s rehearsals with all the instruments that made the light aerated sounds of the 80s (boo-bams and log drums, and so forth) and all that was immediately junked. The idea for the 90s King Crimson was that we'd go back to an exceptionally heavy, big-sounding group that connected back to the 1974 album **Red** which had become, in the interim, fairly to extremely popular having been mentioned by the wonderful Kurt Cobain as being an influential album for him. Its sales went through the roof around the time that Kurt was active. So, yes, a big sound, but not necessarily loud, a sound that would make Megadeth seem quite small, *harmonically*, that is to say. We're not as loud, but there's a size in the voicings of our four guitar players.

You're quite right that it is very difficult to identify the contributions of individual musicians on **THRaKaTTaK**. Deliberately so. It's a great big electronic orchestra. You're not really interested in the name of the second fiddle player in the Berlin Phil, either. Nobody really cares who made which particular sound, you're just looking for a huge dense sound, losing the idea of the individual player.

The talk of the "double trio" I don't think has ever really come to light. Robert's a very astute bandleader in the sense that he knows well the first law of bandleading, which is surround yourself with interesting people and then get out of the way

a fair bit. Or very loosely define the perimeter of the ball park and then invite people to come and play on it. Ideas are thrown up. Over coffee one day I remember "double trio" being mentioned. More could be done, maybe should be done. On the other hand, when the group is together working for very short periods of time... rehearsals are very quick and jammed in a few short days before a tour, so when the music is coming it seems churlish to interrupt and say,"Hold on, this is not the music of a double trio." Most of the devices that Robert comes up with are just excuses to try to get six people all playing something at once. So I don't think that idea of the double trio has taken off the ground at all really.

The idea of the **THRaKaTTaK** album was partly as the sort of yin/yang to the reasonable success of **THRAK**, our album on Virgin Records. Robert, I think, felt the need to redress the balance of songs by having a wholly improvised album follow it, lest our nervous devotees and enthusiasts thought we were just going to sing songs like 'Walking On Air'. This would be a message to them to say that all was well in the Crim camp, and we were very much committed to improvising and experimenting and generally trying to push things forward a bit.

You've been associated with King Crimson for nearly 25 years. Obviously the group has a special place in your musical life. What is it about the nature of 'King Crimson' that has sustained your interest for so long?

BB Yes, I have been associated with Crimson for a long time and it's been very profitable in many ways. It's not easy to find outlets and vehicles for change, places where you can go which aren't any one thing. It's not really jazz, not really classical and not really rock. It's a bit of all three. As you would say, it's got some intelligence, got some idiosyncratic characters that don't really fit. Tony Levin, for example, went from playing *The Rite Of Spring* under its composer Stravinsky at the Eastman School Of Music, through the Gary Burton Quartet, every conceivable studio date, and ended up in rock 'n' roll merely because it was the place he could find with least rules and regulations. And Crimson has always provided an outlet for me to do my strange bits and pieces, therefore I'm very grateful.

It's always a mild irritant that the group is perennially lumped with Yes and Genesis as part of the prog rock movement of the late 60s. It started there and made its most famous record in that environment. People should update their opinions, but updating opinions is much harder work than living with stereotypes and typecasting. When Crimson stopped in 1974, the band turned its back on all that and reappeared in 1980 with a wholly different way of going about making music to its previous incarnation. Playing a wholly different repertoire was seen as idiotic by the management firm and brave by the participants. It was a very astute manoeuvre really because it meant that our audience, as small as it is, is educated into expecting the unexpected, and so the band wasn't nailed to its kind of 'Nights In White Satin' which it would be condemned to doing around American stadiums for the rest of its life. It was able to reinvent itself such as good actors can do and good musicians. David Bowie and people like that have applied those techniques.

As a percussionist I'm trying to contribute to my field which is huge and vastly growing, and frankly people are only interested in new ideas, new concepts. Crimson is a band in which you can do those and publicly demonstrate them. It's a very useful shop window. So there's lots of practical levels in which I love King Crimson, but I suppose it's the old thing about wanting to hear what comes next. I'm just thrilled because I can't predict what noise it's going to be making in five years time, and I'd like to be there when it makes it. **R**

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Larks' Tongues In Aspic (Island, 1973); **Starless And Bible Black** (Island, 1974); **Red** (Island, 1974); **USA** (Island, 1975); **Discipline** (EG Records, 1981); **Beat** (EG Records, 1982); **Three Of A Perfect Pair** (EG Records, 1984); **The Great Deceiver**: *Live 1973-1974* (Discipline/Virgin, 1992); **Vrooom** (Discipline Global Mobile, 1994); **THRAK** (Virgin, 1995); **B'Boom**: *Live 1994* (Discipline Global Mobile, 1995); **THRaKaTTaK** (Discipline Global Mobile, 1996)

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Magazines...

EST (#7, Summer 1996) Interviews with Pierre Henry, Lilith, Tony Conrad and Charlemagne Palestine; an essay by Rhys Chatham; book and magazine reviews; loads of CD & cassette reviews on a wide range of experimental and other non-mainstream musics. Feverishly eclectic, outspoken, refreshing and informative. Plus a long list of useful contacts in the avant-garde publishing and recording world. Published once a year with a cover price of £3.00 from *EST, 41A Bedford Hill, Balham, London SW12 9EY, England.*

Improjazz (#28, September 1996) Interviews with Lol Coxhill and leading Italian improv saxophonist Gianni Gebbia; featured label Splasc(h), live and CD reviews. This is a magazine for improv devotees. (in French) *Improjazz, c/o Patrick Gentet, 22 La Vallée Mismy, 44250 Savenay, France.*

Musicworks (#65, Summer 1996) Includes articles on Nobuo Kubota; Czech bagpipe master Josef Rezny; music of The Glass Orchestra; excellent memorial to Jerry Hunt by Michael Schell. #66 (Fall 1996) Tim Hodgkinson on Improv and Shamanism; Kazue Sawai; Ion Pearce, etc. Plus CD/MC for subscribers. Recommended. *Musicworks, 179 Richmond Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5V 1V3.*

Revue & Corrigée (#28, June 1996) Includes interviews with Charlemagne Palestine, Mark Cunningham, Pierre Mariétan and Knud Viktor; article on Conlon Nancarrow. #29 (September 1996) interviews Achim Wollscheid, Bernhard Günter, Iancu Dumitrescu, Eliane Radigue and Henry Hills. News and eclectic reviews. Well presented and well worth investigating. (in French) *Revue & Corrigée, 25 rue Docteur Bordier, 38100 Grenoble, France.*

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Books...

The Improvisor:
The International Journal Of Free Improvisation
Volume XI, 1996
Executive Editors: LaDonna Smith & Davey Williams
($20 PPD)

Now 'relaunched' as a paperback book, the range of **The Improvisor** is still familiar but the contents more plentiful — personal reflections, theoretical essays, interviews, festival and scene reports, album reviews, book reviews, etc. They plan to become a small press for books on improv, while remaining topical on their new reviews and announcements Web-page.

Wally Shoup draws attention to the need for constant work and diligence if performing improvisors are "to stay fresh, unjaded, playful, humble; increasing one's vocabulary, enriching one's sound, digging deeper into one's psyche...the audience senses when it's 'right', when it's worth listening to, but all too often the musicians don't..." Right about the hard work, but he presupposes an homogeneity among audiences/listeners. Not my experience; it never ceases to amaze me how differently people perceive an improvisation; say, how another reviewer can rave about a recording that I might find insubstantial or directionless. People listen to improv for different reasons and come from different traditions (jazz, rock, industrial, punk, classical, etc.) and so often make value judgements using different criteria.

Jack Wright usefully warns against an improv "ghetto of self-boosters", calling for more *criticism*, less feedback, in reviews of recordings. There's a fascinating, emotional diary account of Tom Djll's stay at Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening Retreat, and a revealing interview with Serguei Letov about the current state of Russian improv and culture; plus theory from Tom Nunn (too much quasi-scientific jargon for familiar observations about how improv is played and listened to) and Mike Hovancsek (more practical). Still an indispensable read. (*1705 12th Street South, Birmingham, AL 35205, USA*) **R**

Free-Forum is compiled and reviewed by **Chris Blackford**

photo: Frances Horn

Reaching for the Unattainable

Until Leo Records released his debut album *Get Ready To Receive Yourself* last year, few outside America had heard of reedsman **Joe Maneri** (born 1927). Highly praised by fellow-musicians like Paul Bley, Ran Blake, Cecil Taylor and George Russell, Maneri is now also receiving international critical acclaim for performances and recordings with his own jazz-improv quartet.

Interview: **Will Montgomery**

You've had contact with so many different areas of music. Do you have a sense of a musical 'home'?

JM My musical roots instantly relate to the cotton fields and slavery: my cultural background is big band swing and jazz in Brooklyn, New York. My musical education, which was unsophisticated, clearly set me up for the big bands and jazz from 1943 till now. My parents from Italy gave me opera and Italian dance music — mazurka, polka and so on. A European ethnic, living in a Jewish ghetto and Polish ghetto and others, for many years gave me a natural affinity for other musics. I believe because I have a God-given gift it allows everywhere to be my 'home' in music playing. I played Greek, Armenian, Syrian, Arabic music like a black man or woman sings the blues.

How about your early life in Brooklyn, how did that feed into your music?

JM I had a mother who was a paranoid schizophrenic and I was an only child and my father couldn't handle it. If you're familiar with Alfred Hitchcock movies, my life was an Alfred Hitchcock movie. It's sad and very painful and I didn't discover all this until I was about 19. It did

change me as a person. Still today I suffer. What came out of me was a genuine — I don't know how I ever got this, maybe I was called to it — but a genuine love. When I realised that it was a situation I had no choice in, I dunno, instead of getting angry I became the other way, so that's why I believe my music has a lot of crying in it. This latest album we're putting out with ECM will have my title, which is **In Full Cry**. You see the black situation and the cotton fields combined with my pain, and probably when I heard the blues I must have instantly understood that the music had the thread of the pain of their culture.

Also, I had over 15 years of psychiatry and psychoanalysis. I never had to take medication, because they didn't do it in those days, which I'm very happy about! But I had one year of psychosomatic paralysis, I didn't even move. I had many years of paranoias mixed with everything else (*laughs*). I had moments when I thought I'd never return to earth! But I got through it all. I have a need for every song I play to be filled with love. And then sometimes in the middle of a love song someone says to me it doesn't sound like you're loving someone; I say, "That's right, I was not hating, though, I was screaming for more."

Your quartet has a very distinctive sound. How do you approach a piece and how do you work with microtones?

JM Microtones are simply more notes, and therefore expanded melodic and harmonic possibilities, in comparison to our usual 12-note scale. Having fully digested 'modern harmonies' and continued on through no key signatures into 12-tone techniques, it makes microtones a *natural* phenomenon in the historical sequence. Since we discovered how the use of microtones worked in the continuum, integration was natural, very musical and an immediate extension of joyous expression in our music.

Our approach to rhythm differs from the commonly used jazz expressions. Our rhythmic structure depends on the melodic 'time-feel' played by the instrumentalists. Each player seeks a relationship through their *own unique* melodic 'time-feel' and our drummer brilliantly holds it all together. Melody — melodic time-feel — is and has within it clearly defined motifs, or a principle motif. Beethoven's 5th, First Movement (*sketches example*) has a motif which is repeated on different notes and continues at faster tempo and so on. (*Sketched examples of 'Ain't Misbehavin", 'Body And Soul' and 'Sad And Lovely' follow*).

Perhaps our motifs are very geared to the late 20th Century and are more abstract and more difficult to recognise. Therefore, a motif when it continues could be very fast, moderate, slower or very slow. We as players (three or four of us) separately improvise these motifs at various speeds with each other. Our time-feel therefore becomes polyrhythmic with 'quick time-feel', 'slow time-feel', 'fast time-feel', 'very slow time-feel' and 'combinatorial time-feel'.

"The ability to discern history's sequential development, that is the thread. Threads of jazz through time, the authenticity in our soul and spirit of jazz roots from the 'beginning', through the 'cotton fields' till now."

Paul Bley has been instrumental in getting wider exposure for your work, both in the 1960s and more recently.

JM Paul Bley heard me on the radio in 1962 and that was only because Mait Edey moved on my block in Brooklyn, who's interest and love of jazz led him to be a radio announcer at WBAI. He met me and said, "What the hell are you doing, that's fun!" And he ended up getting a call from Bley and from Abdul Malik, Coltrane's bass player, who ended up playing with me, with the same quartet at a rehearsal. So there it is. That 62 tape was held back because Gunther Schuller was the one I asked to take it to Atlantic, and he said to me, "Well they don't want it because you don't have any black players." So I got Abdul Malik to play with us and Gunter said, "Well they still don't really want it." I told Abdul Malik that, and may I say that he said

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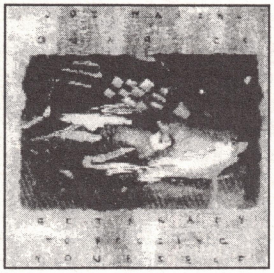

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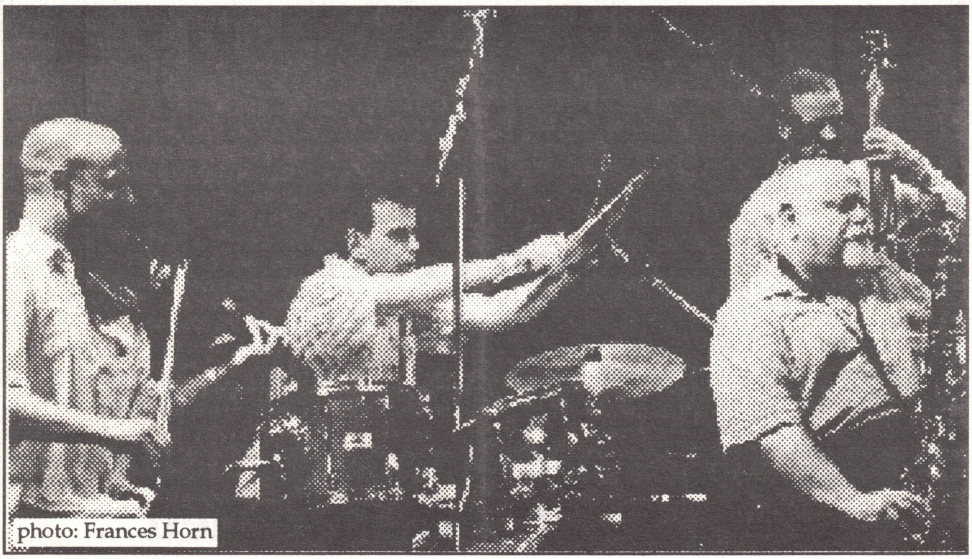

Joe Maneri Quartet, L to R: **Mat Maneri** (violin), **Randy Peterson** (drums), **John Lockwood** (bass), **Joe Maneri** (reeds)

(*puts on Abdul Malik voice*), "Man, Coltrane heard some of your stuff and, boy, he should play under your chair!" (*laughs*)

And, as far back as 1946 you were playing 12-tone jazz.

JM I have to admit that when I played the 12-tone jazz I really wasn't aware of what I was doing. I knew I was doing music and I knew I was doing the best I could, but I was totally unaware of the historical sequence. Of course, that has to be part of my learning disability. I failed all my subjects at school. I went on the road at 15. I couldn't go to high school. And I never knew that I had this disability. And then when I was 18, I studied with Josef Schmid, a student of Alban Berg, and a 5-year course took me 10. And between my mother with this schizoid business and my learning disability, all the psychiatrists said that I had a severe problem but they never suggested that I had a learning problem. They couldn't figure it out. In those days it wasn't even discussed. That's probably why I wasn't understanding the uniqueness of my playing.

In 1990, they proved that I had it along with Attention Deficit Disorder, the works! And I said, "Oh my God, does that add up!" So I looked back at my life and I said, "Oh, no wonder!" Then the neurologist says, "It's very possible that everything you did differently to everyone else was because first of all you couldn't do the things that everyone else did." (*laughs*) "So you figured out the only survival way was to be beyond everyone else or at least different!" (*laughs loudly*) There's a lot of truth in that, but you have to remember that I was very well complimented for playing Italian polkas and mazurkas and Irish jigs, and that is not looking to be different.

Your career in the jazz field seems to have been marked by extreme reactions. Occasionally, and particularly recently, there has been enthusiastic endorsement from other musicians, critics and the public; but more often there has been a reluctance on the part of record companies and others to engage with your music.

JM I believe musicians, critics and the public are willing to accept many things: melodic phrases that are not the usual 'licks'; fluctuating time-rhythm; a full spectrum of dynamics; continual polyphony; long solos alone and with accompanying sections; the form of each piece being unique. The ability

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to discern history's sequential development, that is the thread. Threads of jazz through time, the authenticity in our soul and spirit of jazz roots from the 'beginning', through the 'cotton fields' till now. The words from Duke Ellington's song, "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing" is what I and my musicians live by, and we consider these words a 'commandment'.

"Visionaries will lick the floor for a piece of knowledge they might have missed of any master in the *historical sequence*. Killers of the past are like thousands of cockroaches with no home."

As for the second part of your question, these people are unable to discern the historical sequence and are afraid of change but become willing to accept music with *shock value* and *incoherence*. They call that *'change'* and say, "It's weird and avant-garde so it must be right." Shock value and the avant-garde obscure the view like a spoiled brat can, which in turn closes our eyes and deafens our ears.

When Beethoven said, "I thank God for giving me the gift to reach for the unattainable", in his music "reaching the unattainable" meant the strict obedience necessary to study with Haydn. His fear was that he may not live up to his great master's standards, so he went to another teacher to correct his work so it looked good. Lester Young said he hung his saxophone on the bed post when he went to bed, so that if he woke up in the middle of the night with an idea he could try it right away. Visionaries will lick the floor for a piece of knowledge they might have missed of any master in the *historical sequence*. Killers of the past are like thousands of cockroaches with no home.

Through the last four years our group has been growing in *historical sequence mini-steps*. Every time we play, we play in fear and trembling, trying to be obedient and respectful to our music, as we stick our neck out to reach for the unattainable. **R**

ADDITIONAL NOTE

Joe Maneri has been Professor Of Microtonal Composition at the New England Conservatory since 1970. He is also the author of a book on microtonal music and inventor of a microtonal keyboard. In 1960, he was commissioned to write a piano concerto for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, who then dismissed the work as being too difficult to play. It was eventually performed 20 years later. Maneri's tape from 1962, which was rejected by Atlantic, is scheduled for CD-release in 1997 on a John Zorn label.

DISCOGRAPHY

Joe Maneri Quartet

Get Ready To Receive Yourself (Leo Lab 010 CD)
Three Men Walking (ECM 1597 CD)
Let The Horse Go (Leo Records CD LR 232 CD)

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women *Pumping Iron;* *Marco Ferreri* **meets Bukowski; cult** *Klaus Kinski;* **raging against conformity:** *Themroc;* *Benjamin Christensen:* **witchcraft through the ages...**

Pumping Iron II: The Women
(1984) Dir. George Butler
with Bev Francis, Rachel McLish
Connoisseur Academy Video
CAV 035
107 mins, Colour

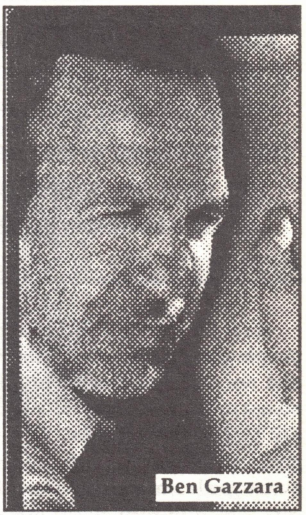
By using two well known female body builders, but setting them in the fictionalised context of the Caesar's Palace World Cup Championship, **Pumping Iron II** uses documentary drama to explore the world of competitive female body building. The acting may be rather wooden at times, but this 'realism' only serves to reinforce the sense that we are being taken behind the scenes.

On one level the film operates as a straightforward narrative about the mounting tension between Rachel McLish, current World Champion, and Bev Francis, ex-power-lifter turned body builder, as they prepare for the final of a presitigious competition. Taking the meaning of 'body building' literally (in the way that men do) as a quest to build and then exhibit the largest possible muscles, the arrival on the scene of Bev Francis' hugely muscular body presents a challenge to the judges' existing tendency to choose women who look 'athletic' but remain 'feminine'.

This then is both the judges' and our dilemma: should Bev Francis' muscular body be accepted as just another form of femininity, another way of representing the female body, or has she transgressed the boundaries of what it is to be female. By raising questions such as these, **Pumping Iron II** also serves as an enjoyable and accessible route into contemporary cultural debates about the possibilities for reshaping the body, redefining femininity and challenging, even blurring, gender distinctions.
Catherine Blackford

Tales Of Ordinary Madness
(1981) Dir. Marco Ferreri
with Ben Gazzara, Ornella Muti, Susan Tyrrell, Tanya Lopert, Roy Brocksmith, Katia Berger
Art House AHO 6060
108 mins, Colour

Tom McDonough once wrote that Charles Bukowski was "a Zen lush". In a way that's all you need to know about him to enjoy this understated Italian/French production. Based on Bukowski's *Erections, Ejaculations, Exhibitions And General Tales Of Ordinary Madness*, the story follows the sordid, dissolute wanderings of Charles Sirking, a booze-sodden writer whose only commitments are to the bottle and the romance of the street. There are numerous, almost surreal, scenes in which Sirking (charmingly played by Ben Gazzara, a member of John Cassavette's acting stable)


Ben Gazzara

attempts to uncover truth through absurdity. A beautiful girl pierces her cheeks with a giant safety-pin; a tiny woman-child hides in a darkened palace, and Sirking attempts to re-enter a womb-like state by trying to insert himself headfirst between the thighs of an overweight woman he's just had sex with (a scene as much at home in the work of Robert Crumb as Charles Bukowski). Ornella Muti as Cass, a tragically self-destructive prostitute, is uncannily beautiful, while Susan Tyrrell and Tanya Lopert are also outstanding in supporting roles. But the film has a certain lack of

humour. Bukowski's work is essentially absurd or blackly comic, yet Ferreri communicates little of this. Barbet Schroeder's **Barfly**, starring Mickey Rourke, is in some ways a companion to this film — a riotous outrage alongside Ferreri's romanticism and distance. There's also an atmospheric connection with Luchino Visconti's **Death In Venice**, which is a far cry from Bukowski's *Women* or *Post Office*. **Ordinary Madness** is more Italian than American, more Ferreri than Bukowski, yet it's still worth seeing whether or not you're a Bukowski fan. Central performances and the evocation of one man's drunken quest for truth across a dirty and dream-like landscape are powerful. Ferreri has captured one side of Bukowski's work, but see this in a double bill with **Barfly** for a fuller picture.
Jim Barker

Lifespan (1975)
Dir. Alexander Whitelaw
with Klaus Kinski, Hiram Keller, Tina Aumont,
Art House AHP 5027
85 mins (copy under review 76 mins), Colour

Whitelaw, an American based in Paris, has directed a few films, made cameos in others, subtitled far more. This is his best-known work; it had a cult following in repertory cinemas, and not just for an extensive bondage scene. The story is familiar: scientific experiment meets conspiracy theory. Keller, visiting Amsterdam, pursues a dead colleague's research into the secret of eternal life. Kinski, a Swiss industrialist spends early scenes brooding in the background, then becomes more central to the plot. The most interesting element is our old favourite — how much is real and how much the hero's paranoia? Though atmospheric, the film depends upon large chunks of narration, frequently a sign of trouble (of course, in the right hands, narration can be a triumph). Here, it's just flat. Aumont, Kinski and the mainly Dutch cast are quite convincing (though some dubbing produces mixed results), but there isn't much for them to do; Keller is unconvincing, a weak and unlikeable figure to play against. Curiously, Terry Riley provided the music, with a few surprise results. It has to be said that this review copy is several minutes short — the aforementioned bondage scene, in fact.
Gerard F Tierney

Klaus Kinski

Themroc (1972)
Dir. Claude Faraldo
with Michel Piccoli, Béatrice Romand, Marilù Tolo
Art House AHO 6023
110 mins, Colour

The late 60s and early 70s was a time of political and artistic turmoil for France. The riots of May 1968 had enormous repercussions, while the intellectual outrage of the Situationists is still to be heard loud and clear in pop culture today. This film was clearly part of that anarchic and violent movement of liberation from the crushing weight of conformity, industry and the absurd irrationality of the state. Themroc (Michel Piccoli is magnificent) is a painter who paints the insides of the gates while other painters paint the outsides. He then loses his job after spying on his boss and the film ceases to be a general critique of the mundanity of work and becomes a tower of rage and bestiality. In a state of turmoil Themroc returns home, seduces his sister and sets about re-inventing his life. He liberates himself from possessions and becomes animalistic in desires and actions. Scenes of incest, random beatings and cannibalism, yet it's the deliberate and gleeful destruction of property which forms the most shocking aspect of this film. A vitriolic and surreal attack on work and conformity, **Themroc** is truly strange (although Faraldo made **Bof!** along similar lines in 1970), not least in its use of language — entirely gibberish. Be sure to search it out. A treasure.
Jim Barker

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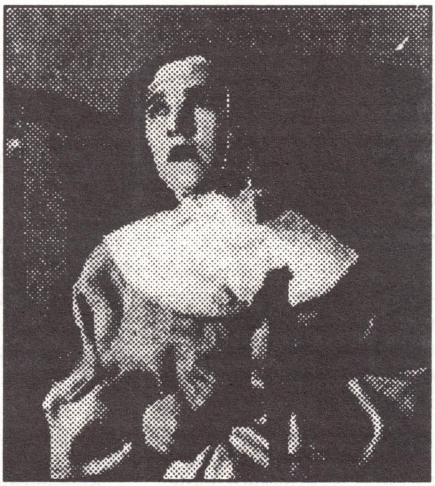
The Häxan Heresy

Three years in the making, banned in some countries because of its nudity and blasphemy, *Häxan*, the dark masterwork of Benjamin Christensen, is now restored to its original, bizarre beauty

Häxan: Witchcraft Through The Ages (1921)
Dir. Benjamin Christensen
with Maren Pedersen, Oscar Stribolt, Emmy Schoenfeld, Benjamin Christensen
Redemption RETN 017
87 mins, Black & White/Tints

Danish film director Benjamin Christensen (1879-1959) started work on the ambitious **Häxan: Witchcraft Through The Ages** in 1919 and completed this extraordinary film in 1921. Christensen had been recruited by the Swedish production company SF, who bought a studio for him in Copenhagen. Its leader, Charles Magnusson, who wanted cinema to attain the artistic status of theatre, lavished huge resources on its production, and in return received one of the most original works of the Scandinavian silent era, yet also its biggest financial flop, due mainly to censorship resulting from its controversial subject matter.

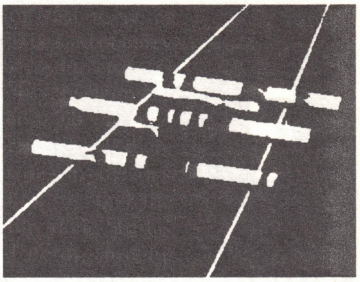
Christensen's earlier work has received the highest praise from the film historian Kevin Brownlow; his debut, the spy drama **The Mysterious X** (1913), is described as "technically an astonishing piece of work." In particular, Brownlow draws our attention to Christensen's "obsession with light" and chiaroscuro effects, which he says "were far ahead of practically anyone else at the time." His "remarkably sophisticated" editing is also applauded. Brief, but very atmospheric, tinted sequences from this film and his next, **Night Of Revenge** (1915), were shown in Brownlow's and David Gill's documentary series, **Cinema Europe: The Other Hollywood**, though neither to my knowledge has been publicly shown in its entirety in this country, at least in recent years. Most of his Hollywood films (1925-30) are now feared 'lost'.



Häxan, though, is usually regarded as this director's masterwork, and we videophiles are indeed fortunate to have this full length restored version, resplendent in original colour tints. But, Redemption's tacked-on romantic piano music doesn't do justice to frequent, often jarring, variations in visual rhythm and mood.

The director sets out to present a cinematic "lecture" showing the relationship between mediaeval superstition and so-called satanic possession, and modern (1920s) medically diagnosed examples of hysteria. If the lecturer's wooden pointer highlighting details from occult drawings now has an antique charm, the dramatic reconstructions of satanic rituals and witch trials (sometimes fetishistic) retain the power to delight and disturb, juxtaposing gleeful irreverence with an austere poignancy — the many powerful close-ups of judgemental and anguished faces pre-echo Dreyer's **Passion**. Exquisitely lit and feverishly inventive. R

Chris Blackford



My Development Of Improvisation Through Sound Sculptures (extracts from a book in progress)

Max Eastley

TORQUAY

I was brought up in a cottage next to pine woods in Torquay. My earliest memories of sounds that impressed, and sometimes scared me, were the calls of the tawny owls in the dark and the pine trees that sighed with the wind.

Sometimes, when everyone was out, I would dare myself to take my father's harmonica, blow into it, then push the key on the side, taking it up one semitone. For some reason it frightened me. A friend of mine lived in a house with a huge shed and we used to crawl under the dusty objects like miners. One day we found two pedals, we pushed them up and down and a sound swelled above us like a sea full of tortured souls. We fled back through our tunnel. We had found the pedals of a harmonium with all the keys pushed down.

At 15, I left school and went straight to art school to study painting and drawing for four years. In the latter part of this period I began to play blues guitar, learning from records available at that time. This gradually took precedence over painting until I was so involved in performing music that I failed my final degree.

In 1965, while staying in Dublin, I fell ill with flu and ended up in a hotel room. On the radio I heard 'Good Vibrations' and that haunting instrument the Theremin. The sound seemed to beckon me back to the visual realm, and that was the end of my desire to make a career as a folk musician.

Synaesthesia

Re-entering art education at graduate level, I began a serious attempt to investigate the relationship between sound and vision and the phenomena of Synaesthesia through working with colour shadow projections. I was influenced by painters such as Paul Klee, Kandinsky and the films of Oscar Fischinger, Hans Richter, Len Lye and the Whitney brothers. I taught myself to read classical music for guitar in order to play with the projections, and this opened up a quite different area to the folk based music previously familiar to me. I made graphic scores as a way of continuing to explore the visual elements in my work.

LONDON 1969

During my three years at Hornsey College of Art I produced my first autonomous systems through deconstructing the basic principles of musical instruments. These self-determining

automataphones were simply not producing regularity, they could not be controlled or sequenced. This alienated me further from my previous musical experiences of predetermined structure and I stopped playing conventional musical instruments. At this time I also heard music using systems: Terry Riley on record and Steve Reich live at the Hayward Gallery. It would not have been difficult to tame my sculptures into producing regularity and machine-like precision, this was after all the purpose of the motors I was using. Should I follow this direction? The music using systems and repetition was certainly sculptural in a sense. The repeating patterns left an almost tactile, tangible presence in the memory of the listener.

'Whirled Music'

After finishing the art course I was awarded a one year fellowship at Exeter College of Art, which included a chance to publish the results of any research. I gathered together the work of the previous three years into a book under the title *Sonurgy*, meaning 'sound that works'. In it, I referred to natural and synthetic systems, both historical and contemporary, from Aeolian harps to domestic appliances: a manifesto that helped to clarify the question of a direction towards more, or less control. This dilemma was further resolved by contact with another stream of musical thinking. I met David Toop, Paul Burwell, Hugh Davies, Evan Parker and Peter Cusack, heard their ideas and music and found that they corresponded to my experiences with the sculptures. This affiliation of common concerns resulted in the publication of *New And Rediscovered Musical Instruments*, a book attempting to expand the notions of what defined a musical instrument and, by implication, what defines music.

A defining moment was a performance given with David Toop at the Poetry Society in London. It was the first time that I interacted with the sculptures in public, switching them on and off, changing the voltage and modifying the sound in real time. It was also the first time I met Brian Eno and I was invited to contribute one side of a record entitled **New And Rediscovered Musical Instruments**.

a presence of place

At the studio I set up a sculpture and we did several recordings using an array of microphones. When we finished, the recordings were mixed during playback — my first encounter with multitracking one source and the techniques of the mixing console. With this medium one could either compose or improvise at the desk. I chose to improvise, seeking that elusive chance encounter familiar to the surrealists and the improvisor.

1976-77

This experience led me to use amplification and a mixer for a sculpture exhibited at the Serpentine Gallery in 1976. The sculpture was a large wall piece producing drones from strings activated by motors, a rich landscape of harmonics where you couldn't be sure whether what you were hearing

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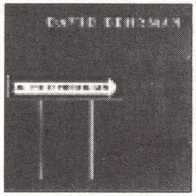

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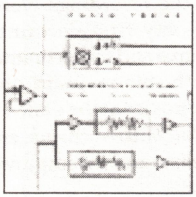

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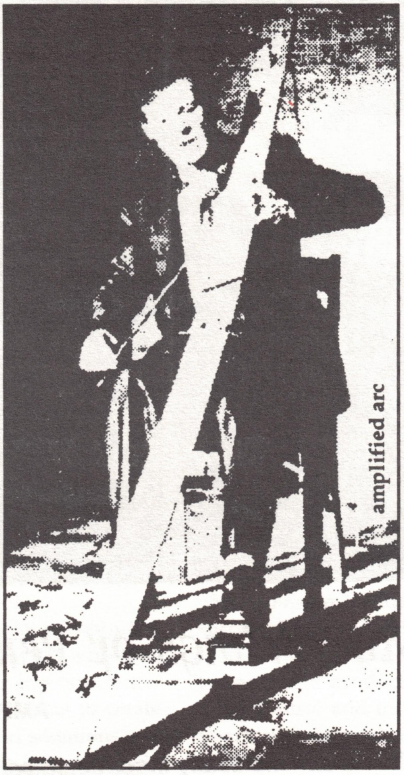
actually existed or was hallucinated. This proved of interest to David Toop and Evan Parker, who were involved in ideas of endurance and extending performance beyond the usual time scales familiar to Western music using hyperventilation as a technique to enter other time scales. During several afternoon performances they played individually, while I mixed the drones, and the audience came and went as they pleased.

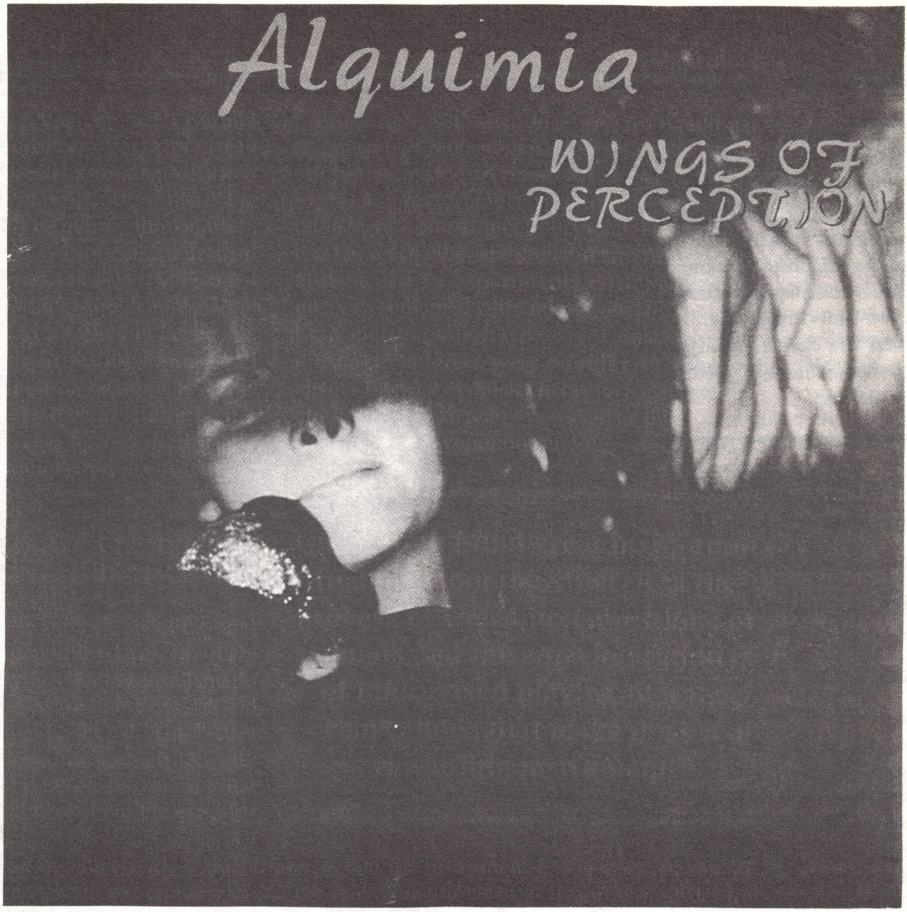


Environments that possess an identity of their own add another dimension to performance.

In 1977, exhibiting at the now defunct Air Gallery with Hugh Davies, I was surprised to learn that we were expected to play at the opening, which took place in the afternoon. This caused me some anxiety as there was no amplification this time. The work consisted of two circular floor pieces. One used stones on a bed of sand, the other, bamboo sections placed on grass activated by a radial arm that drew a small wooden beater across the bamboo six times every minute. Adrenalin, as I discovered that afternoon, can work wonders to sharpen the forces of inspiration. Somehow we devised a game. The work was shown under a skylight, switched off, and the bamboo sections removed and divided between the two of us. The audience gathered. Rain fell on the skylight. The sculpture was switched on and the beater rustled over the straw. Hugh placed a piece of bamboo into the circle: one pitch; I placed one: a second pitch; Hugh another until all eighty were used. Then we reversed the procedure all the way back to just the rain on the skylight. The whole experience for me was very liberating. It was like improvising inside the sculpture or more accurately the sound had became very tangible like a piece of architecture.

'Whirled Music', a performance for instruments sounded only by spinning, grew from this desire to be surrounded by sound. In this performance this desire was literally fulfilled. Using centrifugal force the instruments were flung into space and held in orbit by a cord. The performers, Steve Beresford, Paul Burwell, David Toop, and myself, improvised, defining circles visually as well as aurally. Aware of the dangerous nature of the environment created, we wore masks and the audience was protected by a safety net. This spatial approach to improvised music really allowed a freedom that I could never have realised with my previous instrument, the guitar. Becoming an improvisor from this oblique direction gave me a method with which to communicate directly with other musicians and an audience. These experiences are the foundation on which everything that I do now rests.

I continue to build indoor and outdoor sound-sculptures and installations, and to develop improvised performances outside of the usual locations of rooms, concert halls and theatres. Environments that possess an identity of their own add another dimension to performance. This year, for instance, I investigated the acoustics of caves at the Neolithic site of Creswell Crags with the binaural stereo sound artist Dallas Simpson. We both strongly felt a 'presence of place', a sense of collaborating and improvising with *something* as well as someone, working with



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the distant past in the present. Who knows what the future may hold. R

Max Eastley *has worked as a visual and sound artist, exhibiting, performing and recording in many different contexts with a wide variety of musicians. His most widely known album is* ***Buried Dreams*** *made with David Toop, which was released to critical acclaim in 1993 after their installation/performance/lecture tour of Japan.*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

New And Rediscovered Musical Instruments (Obscure 4, 1975); **Circadian Rhythm** (Incus 33, 1978); **Whirled Music** (Quartz 009, 1978-9); **At Close Quarters** (compilation) (These 7, 1993 CD); **Buried Dreams** (Beyond RBADCD6, 1994 CD); **Isolationism** (compilation) (Ambient 4 CD)

Future releases will include an album with Peter Cusack of material reconstructed from a past project of environmental recordings; an album of Songs of Transformation with Martin Bates; *Divers Memory* recorded at the Pitt Rivers museum with Adam Bohman and Nick Couldry (to be released by Scatter), and a solo album featuring previously unreleased recordings of sculptures.

FILM

Clocks Of The Midnight Hours (available from the Arts Council)

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'Bijutsu Techno' Vol. 45 No. 678
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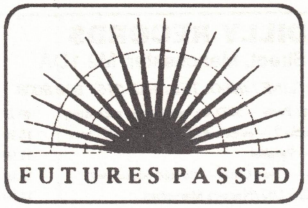

Chris Blackford **rummages through the CD reissues in search of the overlooked and underrated; plus, some recently discovered gems from the archives...**

Soft Machine as you've never heard them; unless you witnessed *Spaced*, their week-long multimedia "happening" at London's Roundhouse in 1969, complete with crazily attired ballet dancers and ex-Army gymnasts (hands up you old psychedelic sensation seekers). The Softs (then Hopper, Ratledge and Wyatt; with sax help from Hugh's brother Brian) worked alongside recording engineer Bob Woolford on the soundtrack to these visuals with material specially composed for the project and excerpts from gigs; all was then cut up and radically manipulated using a tape-edit process involving vari-speed and reverse-sound tape loops, previously brought into rock by the likes of George Martin/The Beatles and Frank Zappa. The music for *Spaced* was used and then allowed to slip into obscurity.

Spaced (*Cuneiform Rune 90*) is both an extraordinary and revealing work, expanding our knowledge of this seminal group beyond its familiar idiosyncratic jazz-rock into the realms of *musique concrète*, even minimalism. Yet, the Softs' distinctive sound remains — in particular, the distorted bass and organ textures. The moods range from fast polyrhythmic sections to the final piece which is lyrical, almost balladic in tone.

As a group they weren't to explore this territory again, a fact which makes **Spaced** no less important. In this respect it's a remarkably assured one-off. Later, Faust and then a host of industrial groups, would take up the challenge of these working methods. How these tapes were "forgotten" and so remained unreleased for this long beggars belief. Indispensable. (*Cuneiform Records, P.O. Box 8427, Silver Spring, MD 20907-8427, USA*)

David Cunningham's **Piano** label (founded 1976) is back in action with a series of mostly reissues. **General Strike** was the name of David Toop and Steve Beresford's late 70s/early 80s pop group. Better known as improvisors on the London scene, the duo brought their experimental sensibilities to dub and pop with this collection of instrumentals and songs most notable for its eccentric, yet accessible, arrangements of 'non-pop' instruments and "noises". In less adroit hands **Danger In Paradise** (*Piano 503*) (first released on cassette by Touch) would quickly have descended into self-satisfied whimsy, however the duo's (plus David Cunningham and guests) charming and inventive exploration of unusual timbres keeps everything, on the surface at least, sounding bright and breezy.

David Cunningham and US composer **Peter Gordon**'s **The Yellow Box** (*Piano 504*) is another intriguing project, recorded between 1981-3. Drawing material from live improvisations with Anton Fier and John Greaves, and pre-sampling studio tapework by the principal multi-instrumental composers, the 17 short pieces are constructed with elegant economy. Rhythms and timbres are weighed against each other with a studied precision that distils, then subtly blends, tinctures of pop, jazz, minimalist and ambient styles. Like the work of Cluster & Eno, the beauty of this music partly lies in the clarity and detail of its organisation.

Voiceworks (*Piano 505*) from 1992 (originally a Japanese release) by **David Cunningham** is more clearly the result of studio based tape manipulation. Here, the composer constructs short pieces mostly from the voices of classical singers, driven by the strident rhythms of electro-pop, or accompanied by

sparing piano and percussion. Voices are cut up and reassembled to yield new rhythmic and phonetic qualities. Lady Thatcher speeds through the shredder on 'Belgrano' — an act of kindness if ever there was. Some voices are looped and layered in contemplative configurations reminiscent of plainchant and renaissance polyphony. Cunningham's ear for evocative fine detail in uncluttered arrangements is manifest again.

While Ken McMullen's 1983 film *Ghost Dance* appears to have been spirited away, the previously unreleased soundtrack by **Michael Giles, Jamie Muir** and **David Cunningham** has unexpectedly turned up on CD. As you'd expect from this line-up including two percussionists (both former King Crimson members) **Ghost Dance** (*Piano 502*) is orientated towards percussive pattern-making, into which strange drones and thematic threads are interwoven on an assortment of simple instruments such as kazoo, thumb piano, conch, mouthpiece. What started as free improv was later tailored to suit McMullen's context — the collision between ethnic cultures and western cities. Happily, the use of studio technology on this fascinating instrumentation heightens the sense of mystery and wonder. An idiosyncratic treat. (*Piano, P.O. Box 5, Derwentside, County Durham, DH9 7HR, England*)

First Duo Concert (London 1974) (*Emanem 4006*) by **Anthony Braxton** and **Derek Bailey** captures their second public performance together (previously available on the Emanem double LP 601). As part of an aesthetic compromise the musicians agreed to improvise within predetermined areas. Among the highlights of these often surprisingly 'lyrical' dialogues are 'Area 6' with its delicate focus on pre-Ambient, sustained sounds, and 'Area 7' whose flute colours and earthy guitar textures suggest a kind of deconstructed/dismembered ethnic music.

Also new from Emanem is **Two Octobers (1972-1975)** (*Emanem 4009*), more previously unreleased material from the always adventurous duo of **Evan Parker** and **Paul Lytton**. 'Then Wept! Then Rose In Zeal And Awe' from 1972 (all track titles courtesy of William Blake) includes some scorching multiphonic circular-breathing by Parker — his technique already astonishingly advanced and fertile. Plus, a rare chance to hear Evan in early 70s overtone-singing mode! Lytton's customised percussion and live electronics set-up sounds like a one-man AMM — capable of subtle microtonal complexity and sheer brute force. The monumental (nearly 43 mins) 'Two Horn'd Reasoning, Cloven Fiction' from 1975 achieves new levels of duo intensity and exploration. As more recordings of this duo surface (see **Three Other Stories**, *Emanem 4002*), so it undoubtedly becomes one of the most important in the development of improvised music. (*Emanem, 3 Bittacy Rise, Mill Hill, NW7 2HH, England*)

Arriving too late for inclusion in 'Alchemy & Improv' (see **Rubberneck 22**, page 33), **Live** (*Voiceprint VP 157*) is the latest CD by ethnic-improv veterans **Third Ear Band**. No date(s) or venue(s) given for these previously unreleased performances: the Sweeney/Carter/Dobson/Black line-up suggests the festival gigs of 1989, prior to **Magic Music** of 1990. **Live** features pulsating versions of 'Sun Ra Raga', 'Third Ear Raga' and 'Behind The Pyramids' (here titled 'Pyramid Song'), all from **Magic Music**, and 'Live Ghosts' from **Live Ghosts** (1988). 'Hymn To The Sphynx', new to me, is a promising jazz influenced raga, yet marred by fade-in/fade-out editing. Most powerful is the version of 'Egyptian Book Of The Dead' from the 1969 debut **Alchemy** — an engaging collision of ethnic, free jazz and noise improvising with Dobson's fiery soprano in fine fettle. (*Voiceprint, P.O. Box 5, Derwentside, County Durham, DH9 7HR, England*)

Comus emerged from the now much maligned, polystylistic ferment of late 60s/early 70s British progressive rock, though few now remember them. They quit after a second LP in 1974. I have to thank Vernon Joynson's encyclopedia, *The Tapestry Of Delights* (see pp. 13 & 15 in **Rubberneck 22**), for bringing their extraordinary 1971 debut to my attention.

This six-piece certainly lives up to their name. In Greek mythology Comus is the god of revelry, the son of Circe and Bacchus. *Comus* is also the title

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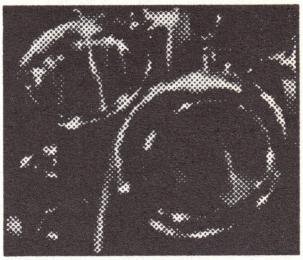
Comus

of a dramatic poem by the renowned 17th Century English poet, John Milton. The poem's central theme — female chastity tempted in the archetypal 'wild wood' of moral perplexity by the demonic enchanter, Comus — sets the tone for **First Utterance** (*Beat Goes On BGOCD275*), especially 'The Song To Comus'. 'Diana', another allusion to Greek myth, also describes the threat of insatiable lust to virtue. Other vulnerable innocents face abusive power in songs about murder, Christian martyrdom and mental illness — described with disturbing candour. The acerbic lyrics and Roger Wootton's vocals (echoes of Roger Chapman) convey terror and hysteria with alliterative force. Gripping arrangements — poignant pastoral-folk to the most menacing acoustic guitars, violin, hand drums and bass, I've heard from this era. One of a kind! (*Distributed by Pinnacle*)

I have to admit that I found **This Heat**'s 1979 debut album a disappointment. Perhaps I was too busy lamenting the demise of Henry Cow to give the new chaps a fair hearing. **Maida Available: John Peel Sessions** (*These 10*) renews my interest with its compelling collection of instrumentals and songs recorded for the BBC in 1977. The jagged restlessness of these recordings makes for exciting listening. Echoes of progressive forbears like Can, Faust and **Red**-era King Crimson clash with choppy new wave guitars, abstract improv and tapework in creating the austere industrial textures; the manic vocals on 'Makeshift' even veer towards punk. Yet, a disciplined and distinctive voice in avant-rock emerges. Highly recommended. (*These, 112 Brook Drive, London SE11 4TQ, England*)

Inspired by Europe's late 70s Rock In Opposition movement, US drummer/keyboard player, David Kerman, formed the **5uu's** in 1984. **Point Of Views** (*Cuneiform Rune 85*) mainly comprises material from their two 80s albums: the debut **Bel Marduk & Tiamat** (originally released on their own Ur label in 1984) and **Elements** (first on Recommended in 1986). **Bel Marduk**, a latter day 'concept album' inspired by Babylonian cosmology, combines avant-rock edge with suggestions of 70s British progressive rock — dramatic synth chords (used judiciously) and dramatic vocals (sometimes overwrought by Curt Wilson). At it best when stretching song structure with punchy polyrhythmic instrumental passages. **Elements** goes much further and is the greater achievement, assisted by James Grigsby's Motor Totemist Guild (soon both groups would merge as U Totem; in 1994 the 5uu's would reform) who extend the palette of instrumental colour with woodwinds and cello. Here vocal lines effectively interlock with (rather than sit atop) these more sophisticated instrumental arrangements. The music retains the complex rhythmic energy of an avant-rock group, while brilliantly incorporating the elegant harmonic shading of an acoustic chamber ensemble (shades of Gentle Giant). A stimulating collection by this important US group.

Free Fall (*Columbia COL 480708-2*), recorded in 1962, put the kibosh on **Jimmy Giuffre**'s recording career for nearly 10 years, hence its long long time out of print. At the other end of the 60s free jazz spectrum to Ornette's stormy **Free Jazz** session — Giuffre's was a velvet revolution. No less shocking to the jazz orthodoxy. The five solo clarinet improvisations still sound utterly modern, and presage the non-idiomatic work of Evan Parker and others. Giuffre's main concern is with line, timbre, and the texture of overtones; his restraint, feel for space, and pitch precision (and delicate smears and smudges of it) are formidable — you hang on every nuance of expression. Crystalline duets and trios with Bley and Swallow also explore abstract terrain. Still criminally undersung. A masterpiece. **R**



Soundbeam, Fractal Bridge And Improvisation

David Jackson

FROM ETHER WAVE TO SOUNDBEAM

The inspiration for the Soundbeam was clearly the Etherophone or Theremin, invented in 1918 by Leon Theremin, a Russian (b 1896). It was possibly the first of a generation of "movement into sound" musical instruments that do not involve physical contact or touch. The Theremin, in its beautiful wooden cabinet, did play a few concert halls in the USA in the 1930s and later frightened many more people in the horror movies of the 50s. But it was the Beach Boys who used it to the most well known effect in their 60s hit 'Good Vibrations'.

It was Edward Williams, the English composer, who had the inspiration to develop a modern and MIDI ether wave instrument. He wanted the 'field' of response to be large enough for dancers to be able for the first time ever to create their own accompaniment by individual, or collective movement. He commissioned the Moog boffins at EMS to help him realise his dreams. By 1989, the first models of the new *Soundbeam* were finding homes. There have been a few dancers who have been prepared to take up this enormous challenge, but by far the vast majority of Soundbeam machines are now helping children and adults with physical and learning impairment to play music. It was whilst leading and resourcing an arts and music project for disabled people in 1991, that I first heard of this amazing and empowering new musical instrument.

FROM VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR TO TONEWALL

I became the electronic saxophonist for the above 70s rock band. As a boy, I had first loved the sound of the saxophone and took it up, eager to explore its amazing sonic and stylistic potential As a man, I loved to combine my instrument with the blossoming electronic effects of the day. There were some highly successful role models to emulate, like The Mothers Of Invention's Ian Underwood, and others like Jimi Hendrix who didn't even play the sax. In search of a powerful sound, I tried every octave divider and pedal available. The music and the roles I played within it, encouraged me to stretch this new sound of the saxophone to the limits. As a band, we in Van der Graaf designed and developed our own tools and our music alongside each other. We played our songs with a strong spirit of improvisation, in both what we played and with what and how we played it.

I spent the 80s helping to rear young and as

photo: Paul Cacner

a teacher, but I was also always composing and playing and learning the new technology as and when it could help me. In the 90s, I returned to performing live music again with a new body of machines around me called my *Tonewall*. There were sequencers, tape machines, and special effects — but no more bugs for the electronic saxes. I was surrounded by electronics, so my own sound needed to be *reasonably* pure again.

By the 90s, I had found a new interest, other than teaching, and an even greater challenge in the field of arts and disability. I ran many creative music workshops a week and had to resource a centre. Soundbeam was a godsend and absorbed into my work immediately. I quickly realised what it was really all about — making musical instruments with amazing sonic and stylistic potential. After 5 years practice I felt my skill, repertoire and confidence had begun to developed enough to attempt a solo recording. The result is **Fractal Bridge**.

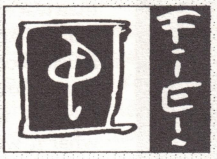
SOUNDBEAM

I often describe Soundbeam as "the amazing invisible elastic keyboard in the air". It is a movement-into-sound system and it outputs MIDI data. The beam emits ultrasonic pulses. It uses a location principle that was developed for camera range-finding technology. The beam can be carefully adjusted, or focused, to detect even the tiniest movement; the conical shaped beam has a range of 25cm up to 7 metres and a spread of 16 degrees. Soundbeam responds to movement in several different ways. Movement both up and down and across the beam can be interpreted as note information, modulation and pitchbend, depending upon the Mode chosen. There are 10 factory Modes written by Edward Williams, each with a quite distinctive combination of characteristics. It is in these combinations that Soundbeam becomes an inspired MIDI controller. It can also be programmed with up to 16 notes of "custom" note information and tuned.

A Soundbeam Rig, or System, consists of a Master and up to 3 Slaves. The Master controls the Mode and Tuning. Each unit can control the size of its beam independently and be in a separate space from the Master. To produce any music, Soundbeam of course needs other MIDI equipment that contain sounds and amplification. Each beam can be a different instrument or sound through different MIDI channels. It can also easily be set to control switchers for other devices such as lights.

MIDI — MUSICAL INSTRUMENT DIGITAL INTERFACE

All modern electronic musical instruments use the manufacturers standard system called MIDI. Many



Winter 1996 releases

David Jackson: "Fractal Bridge" (Fie 9113)

Jackson, the Van der Graaf horn player, explores the strange sound landscapes of Soundbeam, the "MIDI keyboard in the air". An unlikely one-man band, producing music unlike any other.

Peter Hammill: "Sonix" (Fie 9114)

An almost entirely instrumental album culled from Peter's film and dance work over the last couple of years. Brutal guitars, pastoral piano and near-quartet strings stick their heads up above the fog....

Peter Hammill: "Past Go - Collected" (Fie 9112)

An hour of music at a CD-single price: this sampler is an introduction to Peter's conventional (?) song work, taken from several of his recent albums for Fie!. An ideal pool of water into which to dip the toes.

Fie! Records are distributed by Vital and are available at discerning stores or by mail order from SOFA SOUND, PO BOX 66, FRESHFORD, BATH, UK.
(Prices incl p&p: 9113/4 £13; 9112 £5)

different machines (keyboards, MIDI guitars and drums, sound modules, effects, etc.) can communicate with one another simultaneously on the 16 different MIDI channels. All of the many different aspects of performance information, as well as the machines internal structural organisation, have been standardised. Movement in a Soundbeam first produces digital information which can be allocated to a variety of keyboards or sound modules. These sound sources can be carefully programmed to relate well to the behavioural characteristics of Soundbeam. The performance can also be recorded easily onto computers or sequencers for subsequent manipulation.

THE ANIMATEUR TAKES UP INVISIBLE INSTRUMENT-MAKING AND DISCOVERS THE VARIOUS THERAPIES

Soundbeam could clearly offer disabled (or any) performers amazing possibilities. However, there were for me some very fascinating problems to overcome. The first ones were interpersonal and musical; the latter ones technical. The issues floating around were a breeding ground; necessity was again the mother... Where is the beam? What shall be in the beam and how should it respond? How can I get people with *no speech or normal understanding, restricted movement, erratic uncontrolled movement, emotional disorders, etc. etc.* to relate to an invisible instrument?

The solution I found was to make an enormous variety of beam instruments with which to experiment with and to offer my 'students' during sessions. Another solution was to create dramatic and imaginative musical situations and wonderful things to find in the beam. I made *soundworlds* on my Roland D-110 LA Synthesizer which ranged from simple conventional instruments, to wonderful natural sound effects — symphonic/harmonic events to alien soundscapes. Complex patches included sounds with different attacks, decays and evolutionary properties. These could be explored by both the sensitive and the haphazard visitor.

Applying instruments to subjects involves objective and subjective decisions. The quality of movement is paramount. It dictates a possible successful Mode. The mood may suggest an instrument or soundworld to try. An emotional response will indicate a further direction. Many students, and our need for success in an expressive performance situation, led to many refinements of instruments. In private sessions, the need to reach other children lost say, in profound autism, led to experiments with scales and intervals combined with sounds — all to be played by a metronomic headsway. Conscious and unconscious forces were working — which is always the way of music. To be the receiver of the one known *look* in many years can be the ultimate confirmation of communication!

Quite often I find great inspiration rushing from the ether. It is the process of weird juxtapositions of sounds and the amazing fluidity of improvised playing that the beams allow, that make it such a rewarding instrument.

While the instrument-maker was developing his new collections of scales and sounds, the observers were noting the benefits from musical success. Physiotherapists were noting new ranges of movement. Speech therapists were noting better sound production. Teachers were noting more control and motivation. After only seven years people are becoming more and more confident in what is happening as a by-product of Soundbeam. Phil Ellis (see Bibliography) even believes that a new therapy has evolved as a result — *sound therapy*.

SOMETIMES THEY LET ME PLAY!

Every instrument I make for Soundbeam is hand crafted and tested on the invisible studio workbench. They usually consist of two beams on two MIDI channels and are rarely simple. I take factory, library or my own synthesized creations (or accidents) and experiment to see how they behave 'in the beam' either singly or in

photo: James McMillan

combinations. If played by pressing a keyboard they are never the same, so I never bother. Soundbeam is a unique MIDI controller with its own language. Quite often I find great inspiration rushing from the ether. It is the process of weird juxtapositions of sounds and the amazing fluidity of improvised playing that the beams allow, that make it such a rewarding instrument. Sometimes I resort to taking up a saxophone as the beams take over and just play themselves!

FRACTAL BRIDGE

This is also the title of the Soundbeam solo album I recorded and released this year. When one Soundbeam is placed so that it intersects with another Soundbeam, these beams start 'bouncing', or detecting each other. The result is delightful patterns of notes (in fact MIDI information of notes, modulation & pitchbend). The beams playing each other can be fine tuned to produce a simple or complex pattern of events. These bouncing music patterns can then be played by body movement within the space between to produce phrases or larger structures of music. This fractal situation is parallel to that found in the visual world. In the world of sound, I call this interactive space between two or more intersecting Soundbeams — a *fractal bridge.*

In fact, computer analysis of the resulting MIDI patterns produced within a fractal bridge reveals that the endless variety in timing and order (within the events possible) is infinite. The 'patterns' we readily hear are of human interpretation. The perception of form, structure and most particularly emotion within the music, is perhaps an insight into the quality of the human mind itself. *A fractal bridge is also perhaps a factory of musical DNA!*

MODUS OPERANDI — ETHOS LIVE

A great deal of time was spent finding optimum positions for the beams and the microphones for each piece. It was about setting up a space in which most of all of the possible events can occur, and then exploring it and recording the result. Soundbeams were played by my body parts or reflections, and by my saxophones or flutes as I played them. All the Soundbeam performances were digitally recorded both as they sounded at the time and as MIDI information. Sometimes accompanying sequences from my QY10 and sometimes wind instruments were played along with the beams as well. The spirit of the task was to create as far as was possible the essence of the new live Tonewall experience.

The categories, or stylistic approaches used in this record are those that I use live:

Beam Sequences — combination of beams and instruments with prepared MIDI sequences as accompaniment.

Fractal Bridges — pure improvisation with specific scales and simple sounds in the beams.

Beam Control — improvisations over beams which

contain chords and are effectively an ether-organ or "organ in the air". This is easier with 4 beams but quite possible with 2.

Wild beams — pure and wild improvisation using multiple and chaotic Patch changes with or without conventional instruments.

MidiMaps — improvisations over beams driving pages of complex interacting sets of events stored in a computer, which included notes, chords, sequences, program changes, etc (MidiMap, is an especially written program to extend the power of Soundbeam as a composer's tool).

In a very real sense every piece on this CD is a fractal bridge piece, because I was always between the two or more Soundbeams and therefore always "on the bridge". The mathematics is interesting: 2 beams = 1 fractal bridge; 3 beams = 3 fractal bridges; 4 beams = 6 fractal bridges. The chaos is expanding at an alarming rate. The album has one track by 4 wild beams in full fractal anarchy — some sense being achieved by the strangest holding postures! There is also always a great risk and a great sense of unpredictability, especially when playing beams with the end of a saxophone. Beams are also easily reflected into each other. An album could and should be edited, and this one most certainly was. When playing live, I am often ready to give up the bridge, or individual beams to the audience, which raises the levels of unpredictability considerably. It also raises and shares both the sense of achievement and responsibility!

With now hundreds of instruments and an additional sound module, similarly armed, there are literally infinite possible instruments to explore during a live performance. Soundbeam is still an inherently slightly unpredictable instrument — as any invisible musical instrument might be, and that is part of its great charm. Put it together with an enthusiastic novice or two and life and music can never be what you could call boring! I still maintain though, that some of my profoundly disabled friends, with whom I have learned so much about the invisible instrument, are the ones that bring off the most sensitive and poignant musical performances in the beam. **R**

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with Van der Graaf Generator

The Least We Can Do Is Wave To Each Other (Charisma, 1969); **He To He, Who Am The Only One** (Charisma, 1970); **Pawn Hearts** (Charisma, 1971); **Godbluff** (Charisma, 1975); **Still Life** (Charisma, 1975-6); **World Record** (Charisma, 1976); **Vital** (Charisma, 1978); all now available on CD

with The Long Hello (w Guy Evans, Hugh Banton, Nic Potter, etc.)

1975-83 — **Volume One** (Butt Records); **Volume Two** (Butt); **Volume Four** (Butt; CD reissue with extra tracks on Voiceprint, 1993); Jackson, Banton Evans — **Gentlemen Prefer The Blues** (Demi-Monde, 1985)

with Peter Hammill

numerous guest appearances on albums since 1971

Solo Recordings

The Long Hello Volume Three (Butt, 1982); **Tonewall Stands** (Voiceprint, 1992 CD); **Fractal Bridge** (Fie! Records, 1996 CD)

CONTACTS

David Jackson, c/o Fie! Records, 1 Walcot Gate, Bath, BA1 5UG, England

The Soundbeam Project, Unit 3, Highbury Villas, St Michael's Hill, Bristol, BS2 8BY, England (Tel: 01603 507788; Fax: 01603 507877)

MidiMap — **DJM Soft**, 68 Leigh Common, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL7 4NU, England

SU LYN
Lines of Desire

Su Lyn - voice
keyboard
Bill Nelson - guitar
bass guitar
Simon H. Fell - keyboards
bass guitar
double bass
percussion

recorded July 1991-November 1994
56 mins.
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"A distinctive style . . . Lyn's voice is restrained, languid, even dead pan, yet it is at the same time inviting, alluring. She carefully and thoroughly explores her own idiosyncratic genre which splendidly matches the aesthetic content of the lyrics. Lyn is a very special talent indeed."

Dean Suzuki - OPTION

photo: © Jo Fell 1994

LINES OF DESIRE is another example of Su Lyn's bizarre meditations on the 'song' form. The Lines range from pseudo-accessible mutated minimalism to downright peculiar anti-song constructs to practically incomprehensible instrumentals to some of the most genuinely haunting music you'll ever hear. Assisting Su, Bill Nelson (who is doubtless fed up of people mentioning Be Bop Deluxe) plays some guitar and bass and Simon H. Fell makes noises. There aren't many albums of songs that Bruce's Fingers would want to put out, but this is one of them. Need we say more?

Su Lyn's first Bruce's Fingers album Songs About Housework is still available on cassette; send us £14.00 (£16.00 outside Europe) and we'll send you both.

"The nearest comparison (if such a thing were desirable) would be to the work of Robert Wyatt. A considerable compliment but the album deserves it. However, one must avoid hasty comparisons in approaching this music, for above all this disc has its own individual personality. You need to listen without prejudices, with open ears, to appreciate this excellent balance of experimentalism and seductive charm."

Patrick Gentet - IMPROJAZZ

"Minimalist keyboard patterns meet Laurie Andersonesque vox . . . thoughtful lyrics . . . initially soothing but with a ironic sting in the tale."

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Prime cuts

Collision Duo, Refraction
(Confront Recordings FRONT 01 MC)
Guy/Gustafsson/Strid, You Forget To Answer
(Maya Recordings MCD9601 CD)
Confront Recordings is a new label, the intention of which is to release on tape music by some of the less well known musicians on the London improvising scene. An auspicious start is made with **Refraction** by the Collision Duo (Mark Wastell, cello, and Nick Smith, violin) whose music gives singular importance to the idea of process as an end in itself. Their hour-long exploration and realisation of what it means to create is achieved by a level of research which is almost scientific in its thoroughness. They demand and extract sounds from every part of their instruments. The strings are slashed, scraped, scratched, made to justify their stringiness. Their combined discoveries, concordant and purposeful at all times, are like wood — knotty, splintered, spitting when burning. Wastell and Smith play music which is both patient (certain details are lingered over until they make sense) and seething (there is an edgy, agitated aspect to every note they play). But above all they achieve a level of dialogue which is compelling at all times. **Refraction** repays the attention it deserves.

Like the Collision Duo, Mats Gustafsson (reeds) is constantly preoccupied with the details of individually isolated sounds. His playing is especially concentrated and articulate when the pace slows down. There's a grainy texture to his playing which is very effective and, on the title track for example, quite elegiac. The faster pieces may sacrifice a little clarity but they do reveal a more dramatic level of interplay. Here, on a track such as 'Air Is A Significant Factor', Gustafsson is agitated, twisting, restless, rubbing fractious notes against each other. The same could be said of Barry Guy whose extraordinary level of resourcefulness is evident throughout this recording. Each note is imbued with purpose and relevance, no waste no matter how rapidly they appear. On 'EPH' there is a precise, cogent quality to his arco work which acts like a cincture holding together the others' disparate contributions. Raymond Strid is a drummer I have not heard before but he very quickly impresses with a spare, restrained approach which, paradoxically, is effective because of what he doesn't do as much as for what he does. Even when the music is at its most intense he holds back and suddenly adds a surprising new element, bell sounds or a quiet flicker of percussion. While each of these musicians is fascinating in his own right, it is their coherence and collective creativity which makes this such a fine and worthwhile release. (*Confront Recordings, 14 B Lascotts Road, London N22 4JN / Maya Recordings, Carrickmourne, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny, Ireland*)
Declan O' Driscoll

Gerry Hemingway, Electro-Acoustic Solo Works 1984-95 (Random Acoustics RA017 CD)
Gerry Hemingway, Acoustic Solo Works 1983-94 (Random Acoustics RA016 CD)
Drummer Gerry Hemingway (Braxton, Crispell) has had a long-term interest in tape composition, ever since an older brother sat his family down to hear Luciano Berio's *Visage*. He has a great ear: free of the academic pressure to justify his procedures and outside any pretence at voguish mood-tinkering he has created fluid, seductive abstractions with listen-here tension in every note. A collage of watersounds asks questions about the relationship of natural randomness to serial complexitude; his "processed percussion" learns from his improvisor's sensitivity to real acoustic space. Sounds creak and crumble like things alive. The **Acoustic** album has regular-metre ethnic forgeries called 'Trance Tracks' and is less impressive, more a showcase of instrumental chops. 'Dance Of The Sphygmoids' is pastiche gamelan, clever but rather pointless. 'For Buhaina' is a careful Blakey tribute/analysis, but you miss the Varèsian abstraction of the tape pieces (Tony Oxley has shown that realtime solo percussion can

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achieve these moments). As usual, the Random Acoustics packages are both lavish and thoughtful. (*Random Acoustics, P.O. Box 301070, D-50780 Köln, Germany*)
Ben Watson

Ground-Zero, Revolutionary Pekinese Opera (ReR GZ1 CD)
David Behrman, On The Other Ocean (Lovely Music LCD 1041 CD)
David Tudor, Three Works For Live Electronics (Lovely Music LCD 1601 CD)
Ground-Zero present 'version 1.28' of their 1995 release, itself based on a radical re-sampling and re-orchestration of a Goebbels and Harth composition 'Peking Oper' from 1984 (also sampled). Got that? The band are fronted by Otomo Yoshihide, lately the darling of the British new music scene, a position he seems to have achieved largely by being funny. And this CD tries hard to be funny. But its collision of Peking opera, Maoist tracts and adverts is a little like watching slapstick. Others handle this cut-up cultural critique so much better (try Negativland), and whilst the virtuosity of the players is never in doubt, there's too much bluster and forced humour for it to convince this listener.

By contrast, the two releases on Lovely Music are far less demonstrative, and do much more with much less. The Behrman CD is a reissue of his 1977 recording, featuring two 20-minute pieces that beautifully blend computer music with cool, melodic improvisation. In each case, the human performers (bassoon and flute for 'On The Other Ocean', cello for 'Figure In A Clearing') improvise on six tones, the computer providing long, limpid harmonies. If you like comparisons, early Third Ear Band comes to mind, as does Terry Riley's 'Poppy Nogood', but without the urgency.

The death of David Tudor has robbed us of a true innovator in electronic music. Whilst best remembered for his collaborations with Cage, his own compositional and design work in electronics should not go unheard. This CD complements the remarkable **Neural Synthesis Nos. 6-9** (also on Lovely Music). It combines a reissue of a 1984 LP ('Pulsers' and 'Untitled') with an unreleased work, 'Phonemes'. All three works utilise sophisticated systems of live electronics to produce lengthy, uninterrupted sequences of 'pure' sound. 'Phonemes', for example, derives from a processing system that transforms two inputs, from a vocoder and a drum machine, into a 35-minute sequence of multiple chirrups, nervous clicks and bubbles. Little remains of the source material, as Tudor's systems demonstrate how enthralling electronic music can be, without relying on the specious cultural plundering of 'chill out' soundscapes (or, indeed, Ground-Zero's sly sampling). In short, this is magnificent music, all too rarely heard. Lovely music, indeed. (*ReR Megacorp, 79 Beulah Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, CR7 8JG, England / Lovely Music Ltd, 10 Beach Street, New York, NY 10013, USA*)
Chris Atton

David Tronzo/Reeves Gabrels, Night In Amnesia (Upstart CD 018 CD)
The Mistakes, The Mistakes (Third Venture Records TV203 CD)
Those who like their rock adventurous and full of surprises can safely admit that record shops aren't exactly overflowing with good stuff, so let's pray these CDs won't get lost in the shuffle.

You may have heard Tronzo — slide guitarist extraordinaire — on albums by The President, Lounge Lizards, John Cale and with several New York-based line-ups; a man of many approaches, Gabrels is of course well known for his guitar work with Tin Machine/Bowie. But let's get rid of easy expectations: **Night in Amnesia** bursts with ideas (good ones!) and with a playing-derived pleasure that contagiously spreads to the listener. Successfully improvised, minimally overdubbed, with and without bass and drums, this is stuff that warms one's heart while stimulating one's mind. Released in 1995 on the US Immune label, The Mistakes' debut CD wasn't the easiest-to-find title in Europe, but after a license deal with German Third Venture one has really no excuses. The Mistakes consist of guitarists Henry Kaiser and Mike Keneally — no strangers to these pages — plus the excellent Andy West on bass and the perennially overlooked Prairie Prince on drums (listen to his brushes work!). This quartet rocks hard... subtly; the feel of their live-in-the-studio performances is stunning, and I applaud their forward-to-the-past use of panning. A lot more

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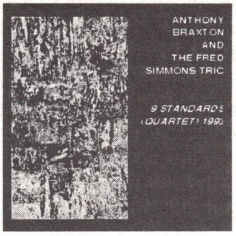
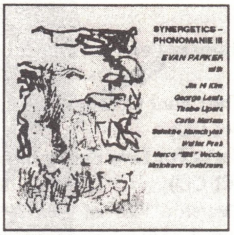


CD LR 237/238 ANTHONY BRAXTON with THE FRED SIMMONS TRIO

9 STANDARDS (QUARTET) 1995

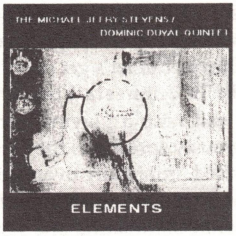
Every new release of Anthony Braxton brings a question: what is it this time? O.K., this time it is a double CD recorded live with a trio of professional be-bopers. Braxton plays alto saxophone and flute as the band goes through nine jazz standards: Cherokee, On Green Dolphin Street, All The Things You Are, etc. Duration of the discs are 65 and 51 minutes. Notes by Art Lange. It is obvious that Braxton's imagination is inexhaustible.



CD LR 239/240 SYNERGETICS PHOMONANIE III;

Evan Parker with Jin Hi Kim, George Lewis, Thebe Lipere, Carlo Mariani, Sainkho Namchylak, Walter Prati, Marco Vecchi, Motoharu Yoshizawa

The title says it all! Increadible congregation of musical talent playing increadible instruments: Imbumbu (African dijeridoo), komungo, launeddas (you have to hear it, for it is impossible to describe), Tuvan overtone singing, electronics, computer, etc.
Documentation of Evan Parker's historic two-day project in Ulrichsberg, Austria, in 1993. Duration of CDs are 72 & 78 minutes.



CD LR 241 THE MICHAEL JEFRY STEVENS/ DOMINIC DUVAL QUINTET

ELEMENTS

Young lions of the New York improvising scene (Michael Stevens - piano, Dominic Duval - bass, Dom Minasi - guitar, Jay Rosen - drums, Mark Whitecage - saxophones) go through 13 spontaneous compositions created collectively. Notes by Russ Summers, recorded in 1994. Our previous release by Michael Jefry Stevens and Mark Feldman (CD LR 225 - Haiku) got outstanding reviews. You better watch these guys.

CD LR 242 EUGENE CHADBOURNE;

BOOGIE WITH THE HOOK

Duos WITH Derek Bailey, Han Bennink, Charles Tyler, Volcmar Verkerk, and John Zorn.

Full-bodied CD of 69 minutes. Mad Professor (his definition, not ours) jamms with the fathers of European and American improvised music on guitar and dobro, but mostly on the communist 5-string banjo. Hilarious! But what does Hook have got to do with it? Well, you have to read Eugene's notes to know the answer.

group-sounding than, say, French/Frith/Kaiser/Thompson's first album, this release greatly benefits from Keneally's post-performance production touches; for those who enjoyed his solo albums, enough said. (*Upstart Records, P.O. Box 44-1418, W. Somerville, Massachusetts 02144, USA / Third Venture Records, Christophstr. 38, 70180 Stuttgart, Germany*)
Giuseppe Colli

Bernard Fort, Fractals
(Metamkine MKCD018 CD)
Eliane Radigue, Biogenesis
(Metamkine MKCD019 CD)
Ralf Wehowsky, Nameless Victims
(Metamkine MKCD020 CD)
Roger de la Frayssenet, Kitnabudja Town
(Metamkine MKCDXXX CD)
In its short life, the French electroacoustic label Metamkine has single-handedly rejuvenated the art of *musique concrète* in the country of its birth. In particular, its series of mini-CDs collection *Cinema pour l'oreille* has provided a rich variety of experimental work. Of this current batch, Fort's piece is the simplest in concept, if not in execution. Each of the five studies on **Fractals** (themselves part of a wider series, to judge from their numbering: Fractals I, III, V, XI and XVII only are presented here) is developed from the same single, simple sound source. Fort's achievement lies in spinning from a single tonal thread a sophisticated web of densities, timbres and frequencies. By contrast, Radigue's **Biogenesis** sets in motion an electronic organism of heartbeats, pulses and circulatory rhythms that over its 20 minutes sees each element shift independently in focus, speed and reverberation. What begin as a set of stable 'signs of life' gradually give way to more unsettling, traumatised indications, as tempi increase and timbres turn metallic. Wehowsky was formerly a member of P16.D4, and the dramatic slabs and slices of tapework of **Nameless Victims** owe much to his previous work. The central movement of this tripartite piece takes the double bass playing of Ulrich Phillipp as its source material, sculpting looming gestures from the delicate *con arco* and pizzicato improvisation.

De la Fraynessenet's two-movement work is that rare thing, a full-length Metamkine CD. Over its 75 minutes this "citation-collage" (as the composer terms it) samples many other Metamkine composers (inlcuding the three here), as well as *musique concrète* pioneers Pierre Henry and Pierre Schaeffer. Other notable "citations" come from Cage and Feldman, as well as from contemporary popular music (of diverse forms, from Prince to Kraftwerk to The Residents). It is least convincing during a 'dance' section, where the predictable sampling of James Brown feels quite out of place in a piece that is otherwise dominated by spoken word and the careful construction of atmosphere through the manipulation of snatches of Turkish and Pakistani musics. I don't expect to ever penetrate its secrets (for instance, where or what is Kitnabudja Town?), yet it remains an exemplary, large-scale electroacoustic work of which Metamkine should be very proud. (*Metamkine, 13 rue de la Drague, 38600 Fontaine, France* — UK distr. ReR Megacorp)
Chris Atton

John Rapson, Dances & Orations
(Music & Arts CD 923 CD)
Anthony Braxton, Solo Piano (Standards) 1995
(No More Records No. 2A CD)
With the self-defeating plethora of CDs released these days, it's easy to overlook a gem like **Dances & Orations**; in fact, had it not been for Braxton's presence, the CD could have easily escaped my attention. So, having thanked Mr. Braxton, I hasten to add that this is the most interesting title in this particular idiom that I've listened to in a long time (Which idiom? I hear you say. Good question. Jazz — but jazz with regard to its exploratory spirit, not its trappings). The actual compositions/performances are derived from duo improvisations by Braxton and trombonist Rapson; but — still uncommon these days — it was the physical performance (ie, the tapes) that was cut-up, manipulated, overdubbed and so on, in a compositional sense. The end result is fresh and intriguing, highlighting Rapson's acumen and the stellar performances of those involved (I'll single out Bobby Bradford's cornet).

Braxton himself is back with a solo piano standards program, after the releases on which he performed a similar repertoire on piano in a group context (check the Leo, Music & Arts

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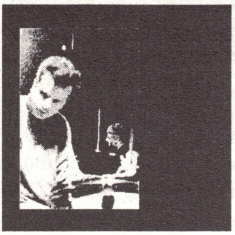
and the passionate heart

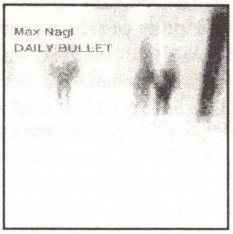
LEO LAB NOVEMBER 1996



LEO LAB CD 022
THE MAT MANERI TRIO

FEVER BED

Second CD of the violinist **Mat Maneri** on LEO LAB, this time with different partners: **Randy Peterson** on drums and **Ed Schuller** on bass. The Trio explores Mat Maneri's compositions by creating new musical relationships in a fluid and lyrical way. Virtuosity of all three musicians allows for uninterrupted flow of new ideas. Avant/chamber music you have never heard before.



LEO LAB CD 023
MAX NAGL

DAILY BULLET

Max Nagl's DAILY BULLET consists of six Austrian musicians. The group performs ten Nagl's compositions written to the poetry of Maria Maturana. To give you an idea of the poetry we intriduced a 12-page booklet. The originality of Nagl's music matches the originality of the poetry. Vocal part is performed by the guitarist Jonathan Bepler.

LEO LAB CD 024
ENSEMBLE UNCONTROLLED

TAPES FROM THE FOREST

Christoph Gallio (Zurich) - saxophones, Eduard Akulin (Tallin) - trombone, Mart Soo (Tallin) - guitar, effects, Kalle Laar (Munich) - guitar, electronics, Takashi Kazamaki (Tokyo) - percussion. Don't be misled by the title ENSEMBLE UNCONTROLLED. These musicians play highly controlled, spontaneously structured music.

LEO LAB CD 025
GREEN ROOM

LIVE TRAJECTORIES

Live recording by the Scottish trio which produced a huge wave with their first CD "HIDDEN MUSIC" on Leo Lab. In spite of the outstanding reviews enjoyed by their first CD, the writers failed to pinpoint the idiom in which Chick Lyall, David Baird and David Garrett operate. With their huge arsenal of instruments they touch on many traditions and genres.

LEO LAB CD 026
ENZO LANZO

RONDONELLA PROJECT

Led by the drummer Vincenzo Lanzo, Rondonella Project envolves nine musicians, some of which are well-know on the international scene: Pino Minafra, Antonello Salis, to name just a few. Vincenzo Lanzo tries to revive forgotten folk songs of his beloved Italy and present them in a new way. The music is full of Mediterranean flavour. Total time: 64 min.

LEO LAB CD 027
IVO PERELMAN featuring **RASHID ALI & WILLIAM PARKER**

SAD LIFE

Brazilian saxophonist Ivo Perelman, who settled in New York, is destined to become a big star. It is not a coincidence that he recorded with the former John Coltrane's drummer **Rashid Ali** and a near legend **William Parker**, for only these musicians are capable of matching the intensity of Ivo's playing. Check your equipment, make sure your CD player does not melt down. Total time: 74 min.

For full Leo Records CD catalogue, LP list and discount prices write to: Leo Records, The Cottage, 6, Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA

and Knitting Factory labels). Coltrane, Mingus, Monk and others are thoroughly explored. Worth investigating, of course, original, highly recognisable (some runs sound just like his alto playing). But maybe somebody should remind Braxton of the old adage that goes: How can we miss you if you don't go away — with regard to his output, of course, not to his physical existence on this planet. (*Music & Arts, P.O. Box 771, Berkeley, CA 94701, USA / No More Records, P.O. Box 334, Woodmere, NY 11598, USA*)
Giuseppe Colli

Julian Argüelles, Scapes
(Babel BDV 9614 CD)
Rova Saxophone Quartet, Ptow!!
(Victo CD040 CD)
Eugene Chadbourne, Boogie With The Hook
(Leo Records LR 242 CD)
Multitracked saxophones, lyrical themes and titles like 'First Wessex' bring John Surman unavoidably to mind and there is no doubting his influence on Julian Argüelles. There is, however, a buoyancy and sense of joy on many of these tracks which Surman's solo recordings determinedly lack (his most recent ...**Rev. Absalom Dawe** was unforgivably drab). Although essentially a solo album he is joined on some of the tracks by brother Steve (percussion) who adds another tinge of colour to these 'Scapes' which are like a series of watercolours — lots of subtle shadings, one hue leaking into another and developing into a recognisable form. It is a quiet, finely realised recording.

Rova, by contrast, paint in oils (straight from the tube) and **Ptow!!** (a title which might bring Lichtenstein to mind) is less Pollock-like than past recordings and more like a Robert Motherwell, because there is here a definite emphasis on organisation of space and clarity of intent while remaining resolutely abstract. The title is in fact quite misleading and only the opening theme delivers the aural punch it promises. Thereafter, these compositions — by all four members — allow for a concentration on intricate details which pass from player to player before they converge, divide, assimilate, form duos, blow freely and reconverge with astonishing precision. 'Zygomatic', for example (dedicated to Evan Parker), evokes the multiplicity of woven lines which characterises Parker's soundworld without being in any way imitative. It is that immensely intelligent, enthusiastic approach to music which makes **Ptow!!** such an impressive CD.

If Rova paint in oils, Eugene Chadbourne is here a doodler, and the various scribbles that make up **Boogie With The Hook** might better have been scrunched up and thrown away. The sound quality is generally poor (although Chadbourne often relishes a love-it-or-loathe-it lo-fi aesthetic) and the duos with Derek Bailey, Han Bennink, Volcmar Verkerk and John Zorn are either disappointing or irritating. Best is the duo with Tyler who does have some sense of purpose even if Chadbourne doesn't seem to grasp it. (*Babel, 29A Connaught Street, London W2 2AY / Victo, C.P. 460 Victoriaville, Québec, Canada, G6P 6T3 / Leo Records, The Cottage, 6 Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA*)
Declan O' Driscoll

Charles Gayle, Testaments
(Knitting Factory Works KFW 174 CD)
AMA Jazz, In One Breath
(Leo Lab CD 020 CD)
Greg Morgan, Spirit Of Light Vol. 1
(Slam SLAMCD 221 CD)
These improvisors are linked by the fact that they have all emerged, to varying degrees, from obscurity with distinctive and refreshing voices. When Gayle appeared, virtually out of thin air a few years ago, we discovered a saxophonist of a muscular quality rarely found in latter day America, but of a type European countries have been producing for years. Comparisons with Dunmall, Picard and Brötzmann spring immediately to mind. Nevertheless, there is something distinctive and fresh about this trio, even if their music is perhaps more directly referential to the American tradition than would ordinarily be comfortable. If you must have your sax players American, and some unfortunately must, forget the rather second rate safety-first approach of David Murray and buy this.

Eastern European free improvisors were once commonplace on our record shelves courtesy of Leo Feigin, but then Communism went away and the improvisors seemed to leave with it. So AMA Jazz is an unexpected treat, particularly as they

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Greg Morgan, 'Spirit of Light'
Mandy Fox & "Hara", 'First time ever'
The Lazonby Group, 'War all the time'
Jon Corbett/Steve Done, 'Another fine mess'
Ntshuks Bonga's "Tsisha", 'Urban Ritual'
Paul Dunmall/Paul Rogers, 'Folks'

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don't come from the more cosmopolitan cities but were discovered in the depths of the Urals. They claim to have had little exposure to Free music, so surprisingly they play it with a surety that escapes many of our finest. What is particularly gratifying is that there are some genuinely new noises and ideas here; to single out just one track the programmatic 'Swarm' — a kind of improvised 'Flight Of The Bumble Bee' — is a delightful twist on an old warhorse. None of their predecessors come close to the skill they display; groups like Ganelin Trio and Pop Mechanics had a kind of novelty value which seemed to make up for some of their obvious shortcomings. Novelty or nationality isn't an issue here. These are world class improvisors of the highest quality from whom we could all learn a thing or two.

The C-melody sax was once regarded as a curiosity but it seems to be undergoing a renaissance (Dunmall again). Greg Morgan proves that it has a distinctive voice and is not merely an inferior C-tenor. Together with sensitive percussionist Chas Ambler he produces some delightful modal yodels drawing on the jazz tradition with chunks of European folk musics. However, overall they tend to be just a little too one-dimensional, but this can be forgiven because they manage to be plaintively beautiful without, thankfully, sentimentality, and for this they are to be warmly congratulated. (*Leo Lab — see Leo Records / Slam, 3 Thesiger Road, Abingdon, OX14 ?DX, UK*)
Bruce Coates

Gregg Bendian Project, Counterparts
(CIMP #105 CD)
The stark choice between a puritan high-brow Free Improvisation and repro-bop Jazz is a false one; and one of the exhilarations of this explosive album is the way it busts that dichotomy. The heads are deviant beboppish complexities reminiscent of mid-70s Braxton. Gloriously vocalised horns cascade into every fissure. 'Chomaklou Was A Desert' has eerie, hanging harmonies; 'Walken' is fanciful but with a shiny, nervous edge. The CIMP label rightly emphasizes its care with mic placement: engineer Marc Rusch dissolves the standard gel, letting the instruments speak tart and direct. Vinny Golia's bass clarinet is wild, tipsy and abstract at once. Paul Smoker's stinging trumpet completes a quartet that infuse Free with such ragged bravo it recalls New Orleans. (*CIMP Records, The Cadence Building, Redwood, NY 13679-9612, USA*)
Ben Watson

Don Byron Quintet, No-Vibe Zone
(Knitting Factory Works KFW 191 CD)
Lisle Ellis/Lawrence Ochs/Donald Robinson, What We Live (DIW 909 CD)
Dean Laabs & Jeff Song, Invisible Maniacs
(Asian Improv Records AIR 0018 CD)
Byron's accomplishments in various contexts are well known; here, he sticks to soprano clarinet, leading a group fond of unexpected twists and turns. This recording was made at the Knitting Factory in a blizzard, before a tiny audience (which may explain the title); they didn't go short. The opener, Ornette's 'WRU', ranges from solo Byron, 50s Cool school mode, to driving band work, solos by Byron and the agile, exuberant pianist Uri Caine, mood-changing guitar exploration by David Gilmore, and closing exchanges in which Byron sneaks in some Scott Joplin. 'Sex/Work' is slinky, almost a samba; 'Next Love' a gentle theme contrasted with the 'Pretty Woman' riff, settling into a real groove. Mercer's 'Tangerine' is followed by a closing romp in which drummer Marvin 'Smitty' Smith threatens to overwhelm proceedings. An hour of clarinet may be too much for some; the wackiness may be too much for others; Gilmore often sounds as if he's at the wrong gig (maybe he came in from the cold); otherwise, highly enjoyable — and Caine is a gem.

Bassist Ellis, former stalwart of the Vancouver scene, is now based in the Bay Area, where he has a productive partnership with drummer Robinson, working with Joe McPhee and others; on this disc, saxist Ochs makes up an invigorating trio. Ellis is phenomenal, with technique range and power to match any other. Ochs is equally at home on tenor or sopranino, lyrical and brutal by turns. Robinson catches the mood, not afraid to join Ellis in passages of conventional time, otherwise supplying supportive textures. This is a strong, clear-headed free trio, well-recorded in the studio; if there is a danger of lack of atmosphere, or a feeling of sameness due to the relatively limited instrumentation, these players usually have

LES DISQUES Victo

VICTO cd01	FRED FRITH/RENÉ LUSSIER	"Nous Autres"
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VICTO cd039	BORIS KOVAC	"Anamnesis-Ecumenical Mysteries"
VICTO cd040	ROVA	"Ptow!!"
VICTO cd041	PHIL MINTON QUARTET	"Mouthfull of Ecstasy"
VICTO cd042	EVAN PARKER / SAINKHO NAMTCHYLAK	"Mars Song"
VICTO cd043	MARIO SCHIANO	"Social Security"
VICTO cd044	ELLIOTT SHARP / ZEENA PARKINS	">Blackburst<"
VICTO cd045	THURSTON MOORE	"Piece for Jetsun Dolma"

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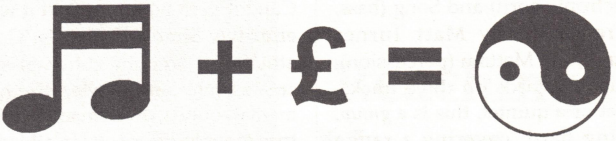
the answer.

More from the Bay Area, this time the thriving Asian improv scene. I'm totally ignorant of these particular musicians: while the overall effect of this 1994 recording is not to my own taste, there is certainly some playing and composing to admire. Laabs (trumpet, electronic horn) and Song (bass, Korean zither) are joined by Matt Turner (keyboards, cello) and John Mettam (percussion); there are additional keyboards on three tracks. Whether as a quartet or a quintet, this is a *group*, the players listening hard, covering a range of styles — avant-rock to newer jazz, ethnicity to moody electronics. Worth a whirl if it sounds your 'thing'. (*Knitting Factory Works, 74 Leonard Street, New York, NY 10013, USA / DIW Records, 2-3 Kanda Awjicho, Chiyoda-Ku, Tokyo 101, Japan / Asian Improv Records, 1433 Grant Street, Berkeley, CA 94703-1109, USA*)
Gerard F Tierney

Various Artists, This Music Is Silent Until You Listen (Discus 6 CD)
In the liner notes of his excellent new CD on Random Acoustics, **Electro-Acoustic Solo Works 1984-95**, Gerry Hemingway describes the pleasures of being introduced to electronic music through Berio's 'Visage'. It is certainly true that the best electroacoustic music has a uniquely transcendent quality. Think, for example, of the transformation from prosaic statement of fact to searing harmonics that occurs in Alvin Lucier's 'I Am Sitting In A Room'. But it is also true that this music can be utterly banal.

Both aspects are featured on this collection of pieces by five British composers, beginning with Martin Archer, the compiler of this project. In very detailed notes he tells of how he organised 'A Game Of Poker With Morton Feldman'. He obviously went to great trouble, which makes it all the more surprising that the result sounds remarkably like someone playing a piano accompanied by a cellist (Angie Rosenfield). Apart from a brief passage where drones are added there is little to distinguish this from any number of spare, stern compositions, except that he seems to desire a Cage-like distance from the composer-role. Simon H Fell contributes 'Mutual And Reciprocal Ceremonies', a work every bit as entangled as its title, on which he repeats and repeats samples of orchestral instruments from a 28 year-old LP. For 'Fly Wheel Fantasy' Robert Godman sampled a bilge pump, generator engines and percussion instruments to create blipping, whirring, droning sounds which were used for a dance piece by CandoCo, in which context it was probably more effective. Simon Vincent's 'Golden Gate' is an attempt at "mixing different styles of music to create a new single style." But his mix of environmental sounds, drum machines, jazz-lite piano and trite monologue results in all too familiar ambient dross. Only Katharine Norman's 'Bells And Gargoyles' achieves transition; this is one for the dark as she evokes the urgent, eerie turmoil of a windy, lonely night full of unspecified threats. Even the church bells sound malevolent. (*Discus, P.O. Box 658, Sheffield, S10 5YR, England*)
Declan O' Driscoll

Mark Harvey And The Aardvark Jazz Orchestra, Paintings For Jazz Orchestra (Leo Lab CD014 CD)
Improvisors Pool, Backgrounds For Improvisors (FMP CD 75 CD)
Post Prandials, High Wire Nonet
(Artichoke/Tristero Records 3003 CD)
It may be expensive to tour with a large band, but it does not seem to be prohibitive to record with one. Here we have one 19-piece and two 9-piece bands. Improvisors Pool consists of Alexander von Schlippenbach and a group of his highly motivated graduate students from the Berlin Art School where he lectures. They are joined here by Sam Rivers, a combination sure to raise a few expectations. The music here will not disappoint. Given the ensemble's name, the album title and the players' history, I was expecting at least some freely improvised pieces. However, the music consists of compositions by Rivers and Schlippenbach that serve as backgrounds for improvisation. Sam Rivers likens them to a painter's canvas, "the background on which he applies the improvisation." Often the structure of the pieces is conventional: theme/solos/theme. As Alex Schlippenbach says, "A good jazz composition creates a framework for improvisation. Given the strength of their rhythmical momentum, the themes can propel the improviser." And "propel" is the appropriate word. Every piece is character-



Two new releases. (4CD) *Ghost lily cascade* by Martin Archer is a groundbreaking amalgam of electronics and improv guided equally by chance and choice. If you're looking for the missing link between new electronics and involving playing, then you've found it. (6CD) *This music is silent until you listen* is a compilation of five new academically incorrect electro acoustic works by Martin Archer, Katharine Norman, Simon H. Fell, Robert Godman and Simon Vincent. Don't forget (3CD) and (5CD) *Network Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2.* "the most exciting and compelling compilation you will hear for a long time" **[Noisegate]** "going from strength to strength - get involved" **[Wire]: 50+ ninety second tracks by various soundsmiths from all disciplines. Add your name to our mailing list now. These CDs are available direct by mail order only. Cheques in any currency accepted.**

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ised by tremendous drive and energy, coupled with superb playing, particularly (but not exclusively) from Rivers and Schlippenbach.

Curiously, (significantly?) Mark Harvey also uses parallels with painting to describe his music. His piece, 'Paintings for Jazz Orchestra' is inspired by six paintings of the prominent American abstractionist Stuart Davis, himself a piano player and jazz lover. Harvey places himself squarely in the American experimental tradition, citing Charles Ives and Duke Ellington as his twin influences and inspirations. He also namechecks Cecil Taylor, Art Ensemble, John Cage, Anthony Braxton... Quite a list to live up to! His music spans a spectrum even wider than one would imagine from that list. At times, Aardvark get into a big band groove and swing as well as anyone. Other sections are reminiscent of a film soundtrack, a stage musical or a modem composition. However, by no means everything is so ordered. There are as many improvised sections as compositions. Despite some terrific moments, the totality is rather too episodic and disjointed to fully command attention, and it lacks the energy of Improvisors Pool.

Post Prandials (also USA) are out-and-out, full tilt noise merchants. Their three pieces (between 15 and 31 minutes long) consist largely of simultaneous improvisation by all nine of them (3 synths, two saxes, guitar, bass, drums and Chinese violin). In an ensemble of this size, this approach generates more heat than light. There is little evidence of the players listening to each other's contributions and reacting to them. Rather, the whole thing sounds like a battle for supremacy. Occasionally, this is frustrating, as some interesting playing is buried under the onslaught of eight others. Most of the time, though, the effect is exhilarating if rather exhausting. (*Artichoke/Tristero Records, c/o 4th Dimension, P.O. Box 63, Herne Bay, Kent CT6 6YU, England*)
John Eyles

GP Hall, Figments Of Imagination
(FMR 31-V0796 CD)
A great pleasure when GP Hall re-emerged on the last edition of *Unknown Public*. Flamenco-style guitarist and composer of no mean skill, he combines instrumental ability with an intelligent experimentalism, using electronics, preparations and adapted instruments. **Figments** (1974-95) also features greats like Lol Coxhill, Jeff Clyne, Lyn Dobson and Paul Rutherford. Hall's music belongs to a personal territory and is best served on the solo tracks. With another retrospective due out on FMR in early 1997, perhaps his time has come.
Gus Garside

Badland, Badland
(Bruce's Fingers BF14 CD)
Biggi Vinkeloe Trio, Claq
(Slask Records SLA 016 CD)
Koch/Schütz/Studer, Hardcore Chambermusic
(Intakt 042 CD)
Ornette Coleman took jazz back to its roots in melodic invention. Harmony was sidelined and the pianist and rhythm guitarist inessential. As a result the basic sax, bass, drums unit flourished and here are three (well OK, on one the bass is replaced by cello).

Coleman is referred to directly on **Badland** which includes his poignant ballad 'Sadness'. The central figure here is bassist Simon Fell, who runs Bruce's Fingers, and comparison with his trio with Alan Wilkinson and Paul Hession is inevitable. It is saxophonist Simon Rose who makes the difference — combining an abrasive tone with a lyrical approach, he drives the others to extremes of invention. As one might expect from Fell and Mark Sanders, the results are magic. It is the sheer range of this album that marks it out, from full throttle blowing through quiet lyricism to abstract soundscapes. The last two are neatly combined in what is for me the pivotal track — a superb and surprising rendition of Ellington's 'Come Sunday'.

The blurred image on the cover of **Claq** is surely ironic. The music itself is taut, concise and sharply focused in conception and execution. Swedish saxophonist Biggi Vinkeloe, credited with all the compositions, using her resources well, exploring every combination — the full trio (with Peter Friis Nielsen on electric bass and Peeter Uuskyla on drums) is not heard until track 8. The album's overall shape is as complex and neat as each track; the elegant magnetism of Vinkeloe's flute playing, reserved till the last quarter, leaves you feeling that you have travelled a long long way from the helter-skelter of the opening tracks. But throughout

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BARRY GUY & ANTHONY BRAXTON. LONDON JAZZ COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA. ZURICH CONCERTS. Barry Guy, Anthony Braxton, Henry Lowther, Marc Charig, Jon Corbett, Paul Rutherford, Radu Malfatti, Alan Tomlinson, Steve Wick, Trevor Watts, Evan Parker, Simon Picard, Peter McPhail, Paul Dunmall, Phil Wachsmann, Howard Riley,Barre Phillips, Dave Holland, Paul Lytton, Tony Oxley. Intakt CD 005 (2CDs)

SCHWEIZER - MOHOLO. Irène Schweizer, Louis Moholo. Intakt CD 006

SCHWEIZER - SOMMER. Irène Schweizer, Günter Sommer. Intakt CD 007

SCHWEIZER - CYRILLE. Irène Schweizer, Andrew Cyrille. Intakt CD 008

SCHWEIZER - FAVRE. Irène Schweizer, Pierre Favre. Intakt CD 009

SCHWEIZER - BENNINK. Irène Schweizer, Han Bennink. Intakt CD 010

PARIS QUARTET. Joëlle Léandre, Irène Schweizer, Daunike Lazro, Ives Roberts. Intakt LP 012

LONDON JAZZ COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA. HARMOS. Barry Guy, Henry Lowther, Marc Charig, Jon Corbett, Paul Rutherford, Radu Malfatti, Alan Tomlinson, Steve Wick, Trevor Watts, Evan Parker, Simon Picard, Peter McPhail, Paul Dunmall, Phil Wachsmann, Howard Riley, Barre Phillips, Paul Lytton. Intakt CD 013

HANS KOCH. ULURU. Hans Koch Solo. Intakt CD 014

DAVID MOSS AND DIRECT SOUND. Greetje Bijma, Shelley Hirsch, Anna Homler, David Moss, Carles Santos. Intakt CD 015

DIESNER - JOHANSSON. KONSUMDELIKATESSWARE. Dietmar Diesner, Sven-Ake Johansson. Intakt CD 016

STEPHAN WITTWER. WORLD OF STRINGS. Stephan Wittwer Solo. Intakt CD 017

MARTIN SCHÜTZ - HANS KOCH. APPROXIMATIONS. Butch Morris, Shelley Hirsch, Jason Hwang, Andrew Cyrille, Tom Cora, Pippin Barnett, Martin Schütz, Hans Koch. Intakt CD 018

LONDON JAZZ COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA. DOUBLE TROUBLE. Barry Guy, Henry Lowther, Marc Charig, Jon Corbett, Paul Rutherford, Radu Malfatti, Alan Tomlinson, Steve Wick, Trevor Watts, Evan Parker, Simon Picard, Peter McPhail, Paul Dunmall, Phil Wachsmann, Howard Riley, Barre Phillips, Paul Lytton. Intakt CD 019

IRENE SCHWEIZER PIANO SOLO VOL. I. Intakt CD 020

IRENE SCHWEIZER PIANO SOLO VOL. II. Intakt CD 021

DAVID MOSS. MY FAVORITE THINGS. Intakt CD 022

WÄDI GYSI - HANS REICHEL. SHOW DOWN. Wädy Gysi, Hans Reichel. Intakt CD 023

LONDON JAZZ COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA. THEORIA. FEAT. IRENE SCHWEIZER. Barry Guy, Henry Lowther, Marc Charig, Jon Corbett, Conrad Bauer, Radu Malfatti, Alan Tomlinson, Steve Wick, Trevor Watts, Evan Parker, Simon Picard, Peter McPhail, Paul Dunmall, Phil Wachsmann, Irène Schweizer, Barre Phillips, Paul Lytton. Intakt CD 024

EUGENE CHADBOURNE. STRINGS. Eugene Chadbourne Solo. Intakt CD 025

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CHOCKSHUT. Hans Koch, Andreas Marti, Jacques Demierre, Martin Schütz, Stephan Wittwer, Fredy Studer. Intakt 031

WITTWER-SCHÜTZ-LOVENS. CHOICE-CHASE. Stephan Wittwer, Martin Schütz, Paul Lovens. Intakt 032

LES DIABOLIQUES. Irène Schweizer, Maggie Nicols Joëlle Léandre. Intakt 033

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KOCH-SCHÜTZ-STUDER. HARDCORE CHAMBERMUSIC. Hans Koch, Martin Schütz, Fredy Studer. Intakt CD 042

PALINCKX. BORDER. LIVE IN ZÜRICH. Joost Buis, Jacques Palinckx, Cor Fuhler, Bert Palinckx, Jim Meneses. Intakt CD 043

IRENE SCHWEIZER. MANY AND ONE DIRECTION. PIANO SOLO. Irène Schweize. Intakt CD 044

LONDON JAZZ COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA. THREE PIECES FOR ORCHESTRA. FEAT. MARILYN CRISPELL AND MAGGIE NICOLS. Barry Guy, Maggie Nicols, Henry Lowther, Marc Charig, Jon Corbett, Paul Rutherford, Chris Bridges, Alan Tomlinson, Robin Hayward, Trevor Watts, Evan Parker, Simon Picard, Peter McPhail, Paul Dunmall, Phil Wachsmann, Marilyn Crispell, Howard Riley, Barre Phillips, Paul Lytton. Intakt CD 045

DÖROTHEA SCHÜRCH. INTERNI PENSIERI. Dorothea Schürch, Michel Seigner, Ernst Thoma. Intakt CD 046

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there is something in the feel that causes most commentators to mention the name of Ornette Coleman again.

With **Hardcore Chambermusic** all references to jazz heritage are finally laid to rest. This is contemporary music — rock-tinged (Swiss) improv over an array of found and created samples. The found material is used intelligently, providing depth rather than musical substance. Whether grooving or creating chilling atmospheres, Hans Koch (clarinets, saxes, sampling, sequencer programming), Martin Schutz (electric 5-string cello, acoustic cello) and Fredy Studer (drums, percussion) are a spellbinding combination of voices in a complex, intriguing and totally gripping production. (*Bruce's Fingers, 24 Chauntry Road, Haverhill, Suffolk, CB9 8BE, England / Slask Records, Box 27 S-43084 Styrso, Sweden / Intakt Records, P.O. Box 468, CH 8024 Zürich, Switzerland*)
Gus Garside

Brian Lavelle & Richard Youngs, Radios 2
(Freek Records FRR023 CD)
B-Shops For The Poor, A Passionate Journey
(No Wave NWCD 006 CD)
Various Artists, The Red Rose Concerts
(MTB MTB020 MC)
Rolf Harris never knew what he was unleashing on the world when he introduced the stylophone. The dark, densely textured soundworld which Lavelle and Youngs inhabit makes you wish you'd never thrown the irritating thing away. Of course, they do play slide guitar as well. Though these improvisations are to some extent limited in their scope, it is the subtle shifts of direction that keep you enthralled. This is Volume Two of 10 and it is hoped that they have enough in their armoury to sustain the momentum.

B-Shops display a mixture of improvisation and out-rock noise which will be familiar to regular listeners. On the surface this is exhilarating stuff but it lacks subtlety and a clarity of ideas that might elevate it above cliché. Their abrupt jumps in direction feel unnatural and this contrived quality becomes increasingly irritating. They also have a built-in inability to let improvisation develop, arising mainly from the use of free improvising techniques as mere gesture. None of this is helped by the raw nature of the live recording. However, moments of occasional brilliance occur, but generally what might have come across well in the adrenaline of the live performance does not transfer well to recording.

In contrast, the even poorer recording quality of the compilation of improvisations from London's Red Rose Club, cannot disguise the excellence of the majority of them. Some of the most interesting of the younger generation of British improvisors are represented here. Conspiracy (Couldry, Bohman *et al*) are fairly familiar but the other groups are virtually unknown and deserve wider recognition. There isn't room to mention all the individuals involved, but the groups Identical and 46,000 Fibres provide some of the most interesting work. It is noteworthy that the majority of the featured groups choose to work in a slowly evolving textural way, reminiscent of AMM's approach but with very different use of language. There are a couple of questionable pieces, in particular John Plant's 'Days' and 'Murderer'; this is due to Plant's flat delivery of his prepared text. Younger players are still shamefully under-represented on established labels and if there is any justice this recording will bring them the attention they deserve. (*Freek Records, P.O. Box 3585, London NW3 3RH / No Wave, P.O. Box 796, London, SE20 7UD / MTB, 76 Sullivan Court, Fulham, London, SW6 3DB*)
Bruce Coates

John Law, Pentecost
(FMR CD27-0396 CD)
Veryan Weston, Playing Alone
(ACTA 9 CD)
Christine Wodrascka, Vertical
(FMP CD 79 CD)
Three contrasting approaches to solo piano. John Law's **Pentecost** is the second in a series of three solo piano recitals, which began with the intriguing **Talitha Cumi** in 1994. Recorded in concert, it features one long (51 minutes) piece plus a short encore. The long piece, entitled 'Spirit Music For Pentecost', displays Law's current fascination with mediaeval music, particularly religious music. An improvisation based on early monastic music, it begins simply and establishes a mood of tranquility. It then sets up an ebb and flow of tension throughout, ending in a thunderous

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finale. For me, Law has become one of a select group of musicians (Ornette, Lacy, Evan, Giuffre, Frisell...) whose every release brings a tingle of expectation. This release heightens anticipation of the next!

Veryan Weston recorded at home one evening on a Bechstein that he had just bought for a bargain at an auction. His three pieces are entitled 'One', 'After', 'Another'. All are continuous improvisations (unlike his previous solo recording **Underwater Carol**, which was mainly composed). Weston has awesome technique plus the speed of thought to exploit it. This makes for thrilling improvisation. His speciality is firing off salvo after salvo of rapid notes but avoiding clichés or repetition. The speed of his fingerwork is amazing, never mind the speed of his brain! It is not all pyrotechnics, though. On more measured passages, his playing is just as fresh and original.

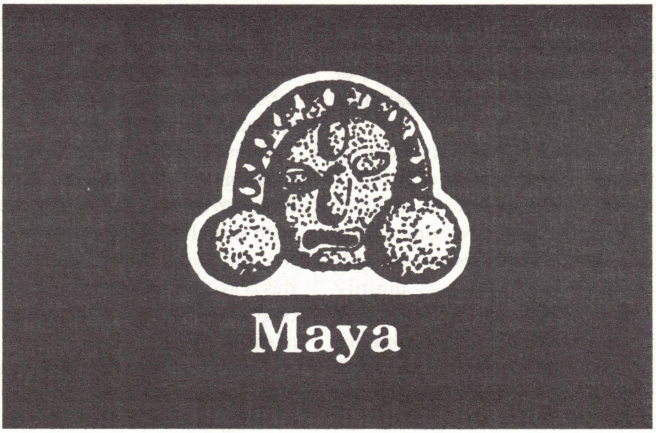
Christine Wodrascka was also recorded live in concert. She delivers up 12 comparatively short pieces. Each has a constancy of mood and a formality of structure that suggests composition rather than improvisation. There is plenty of variation of technique, dynamics and mood between the pieces. Wodrascka uses techniques like placing metallic objects on the strings of the piano to give them a rinky-dink sound, and playing inside the piano with, I think, a wire brush, producing a percussive effect. When playing straight she frequently uses a disjointed, staccato style which is both distinctive and personal, but it is rather overused here. Taken alone, this is an enjoyable recording, maybe rather too controlled for some tastes. When played alongside Law or Weston, it does suffer by comparison. (*FMR, 10 Baddow Road, Chelmsford, Essex, CM2 0DG, England / ACTA, 28 Aylmer Road, London W12 9LQ / FMP distributed by Cadillac — 0171 278 7391*)
John Eyles

Four Bop Drop, Improv
(no label, no number, MC)
Tippett/Kellers/Tippett, Twilight Etchings
(FMP 65 CD)
Relay, Random Play
(2.13 Music 001 CD)
The English improvised music scene seems to be going through a healthy period of renewal. The first generation of players are more active than ever and subsequent ones have emerged challenging our perceptions of freedom in musical and social relations. Here's three from the recent crop of recorded manifestations.

I enjoyed Four Bop Drop, but it's a curious offering. It belongs to the era when the spirit of free jazz enlivened English jazz-rock, producing such singular combinations as Pinski Zoo and Rip Rig and Panic. For all its top-of-register edginess this is a comfortable album, lacking the funky drive of groups like Pinski Zoo or the spiritual intensity of 60s free jazz.

Spiritual intensity abounds on the Tippett/Kellers/Tippett recording of their Total Music Meeting gig in October 93. The ability to connect with and disturb the soul emanating primarily from Keith Tippett's piano. Yet, his presence is often almost subliminal — teasing, probing and embracing the more upfront contributions of the other two. Percussionist Willi Kellers is resourceful, full of ideas, both initiating and responding to the dramatic flow. I'm less happy about Julie Tippett's role. Skilful, tenacious and cussed; I can't help feeling that much of the time she is working over and not with her fellow-musicians. Nevertheless, she is to be applauded for challenging the restrictive practice of Western European singing.

Relay is the document of an event. "At 2.13pm (on June 18th 95) three trios started playing — one in a tent, one in a gallery and one in a church hall. After ten minutes the remaining musicians set out, and when one of them entered a venue they ousted one of the trio playing there — who went off to another venue and displaced another musician and so on..." Great music, great players (including Eddie Prévost, Dave Fowler, Alan Wilkinson, Suzanna Ferrar and John Edwards). The sequence is arbitrary; as suggested you can have fun with your random play button. Meandering and transient, the event has resulted in a CD that I'm unlikely to play often. But, if ever I need reminding of the inventiveness and generosity of the human spirit at its best, here it is. (*Four Bop Drop, P.O. Box 391, Northampton, NN3 2YU, England / 2:13 Music, 1 Macaulay House, Woodlea Road, Stoke Newington, London N16 0TR*) **R**
Gus Garside



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ShortCuts

Reviewed by
Chris Blackford

Faust *Rien* (Table Of The Elements Chromium 24 CD) Faust's first studio recordings in 20 years. In the interim, much cross-fertilisation has occurred between various avant camps, and a not insignificant chunk of this inspired by Faust. So, parts of **Rien** could have been made by the Japanese underground (Keiji Haino guests), UK lo-fi industrialists and European avant-rockers. No surprises then, more a confirmation of the scope of Faust's influence. 'Listen To The Fish' trips down psychedelic-Krautrock memory lane, though overlong at over 15 minutes — almost nostalgic. Penultimate piece: typical brutal Faustian collage tinged by an aura of beleaguered romanticism. In times past, the studio FX, the title-track, silver sleeve, spoken credits, would all have seemed rather radical, now little more than mere novelty. Constant reminders of their 'legendary' status are a mixed blessing; for all its fine craftsmanship **Rien** is still somewhat bound by the trappings of this legend. The challenge facing 90s Faust is to create the legend anew. (*Table Of The Elements, P.O. Box 5524, Atlanta, Georgia 30307, USA*)

Elodie Lauten *Tronik Involutions* (O.O. Discs #27 CD); **Chris Mann & The Impediments**, *Chris Mann & The Impediments* (O.O. Discs #21 CD) So-called "reclusive mystic", daughter of US jazz pianist and drummer Erroll Parker, and former pupil of minimalist La Monte Young, Elodie Lauten's "Universal Mode Improvisation" (sleeve-notes explain its mystical roots) conjures soundscapes of lush complexity with layer upon layer of iridescent synths, underpinned by interlocking drum machines, sprinkled with limpid tintinnabulation. Echoes of Steve Reich's gamelan pieces, Jon Hassell's "Fourth World" exoticism, Conlon Nancarrow's maniacal tempi, but occasionally lapsing into New Age/ambient mush. Too sweet, or excitingly fragrant? Guaranteed to divide opinion. Judging by the number of times I've already played this enchanting album, I must be under its spell.

Chris Mann & The Impediments will be another divider. If you think Jon Rose is weird stuff, listen to these Aussie sound-poets/noise improvisors. Chris Mann and Rik Rue are also members of Machine For Making Sense (see Jim Denley in **Rubberneck 17**), here joined by Carolyn Connors and Jeannie Marsh. 80 tracks in 36:41... Frightening, isn't it. Most are a matter of seconds — fleeting soundbites of spoken/sung text and vocal manipulations with/without textural found sounds and electronics. Kurt Schwitters would have heartily approved of their aberrant syntax and phonetic juxtapositions. A delightfully inextricable tangle of pithy profundity, smart-ass self-indulgence and playful absurdity. No track titles, no booklet — the jewel case is the only transparent thing here. Shuffle-play recommended, naturally. (*O.O. Discs, 261 Groovers Avenue, Black Rock, CT 06605-3452, USA*)

Chris Mann

Martin Archer *Ghost Lily Cascade* (Discus 4CD CD) 10 compositions which started life as solo synthesizer improvisations by Martin Archer. Nine musicians were then each asked to create instrumental lines "in their own time in their own locations". The resulting strands have been interwoven and manipulated by Archer in the studio, exploiting a fertile amalgam of controlled recombination and "chance interactions". Happily, the end product fulfils the eccentric promise of the theory. Archer's treatments dextrously retain the tonal idiosyncrasies of the distinctive instrumentalists, like Charlie Collins, Simon H Fell, John Jasnoch and Martin Jones, all long-time Yorkshire collaborators. Pieces flow with a freshness, unpredictability and alertness to timbral detail that

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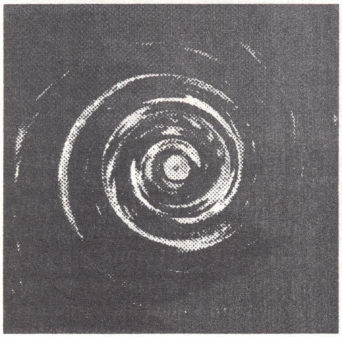

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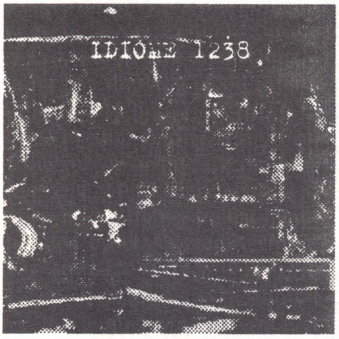

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one associates with sensitive group improvisation, escaping the soulless rigidity of too many studio assemblages. 'Field System, Tumulus, Eyes Within Stone' creates a memorable airiness from crisp percussive cycles and cirrus synths, while 'Telecottage' juxtaposes ambient synth-vocals and jungle-like drum machines. Most pieces defy classification, focusing on the intriguing relationships between sounds, rather than playing the idiomatic reference game. It's Martin Archer's most impressive work to date. And splendid artwork, too.

Jon Corbett/Steve Done *Another Fine Mess* (Slam CD 217 CD) Something quintessentially 'British' about this release, obviously beyond the fact that both improvisors *are* British. It's in the intricacy of the predominantly acoustic sounds, the unflamboyant intimacy of their rapport, which falls so neatly inside the great tradition of small-group British improv. Sometimes you could mistake this for an early Incus release. And Steve Done (guitars) whose interest in improv deepened in the mid-80s, has more than an occasional Baileyesque turn of phrase, although his delicate note-bending hints at a blues orientation. LMC stalwart, Jon Corbett, who deserves a much higher international profile, responds with his own moody inflexions bringing glimmers of warmth and humour to these brisk dialogues; his trumpet and trombone attack is reined-in to complement the guitarist's harmonic detail.

Beñat Achiary/Michel Doneda *Ce n'est pourtant...* (L'empreinte digitale ED 13056) After 18 years performing as a duo they've finally been recorded. And one can almost sense a celebratory outpouring as these French improvisors hit the emotional heights. Michel Doneda, one of improvised music's most

Beñat Achiary

original saxophonists, is the better known (see **Rubberneck 17**); duo partner, singer and occasional percussionist Beñat Achiary, is virtually unknown here in Britain. His tenor's light tessitura cuts the air like the cry of the muezzin, his breathy falsetto descends with the strange, balletic grace of a blown feather. Doneda's soprano vocabulary resists the usual adjectival appendages; he's well beyond the limitations of incendiary free jazz saxophony, in a realm where the search for a new sonic expressivity, focused on the nuances of timbre, evokes a primordial poignancy. Together, and this is always the music of a finely attuned duo, they work wonders. (*L'empreinte digitale, Domaine de la Garde, 13510 Eguilles, France*)

Evan Parker & Sainkho Namtchylak *Mars Song* (Victo cd042 CD) I had the pleasure of hearing Sainkho Namtchylak with Evan Parker at the First LMC Festival in 1992; I think it was their first duo performance: respectful, yet challenging. This Toronto performance is more ambitious, but initially doesn't always achieve a fully integrated dialogue. Parker's 'cyclical' pattern-making on soprano is generally best reserved for a solo context; in duo, especially with the emotionally direct qualities of the human voice, its hermetic structures sometimes inhibit conversation. On the opening 'Song Of Eclipse' Sainkho often merely embellishes or imitates his multiphonic layers; yet, on the extraordinary 'Transit Of Venus' the understated tenor leaves more space for Sainkho to set up an incredibly tense dialogue by exploring extreme (yes, *extreme*) vocal textures. By the long third piece the dialogue is beautifully balanced, now both interweaving and superimposing their distinctive multiphonic styles — Sainkho concluding with some haunting overtone singing. As strange and compelling a music as you'd expect from these original stylists, it's also remarkably majestic. Doubtless, you already have **Amulet** (Sainkho with Ned Rothenberg on Leo), now you'll need **Mars Song**.

Peter Hammill *Sonix* (Fie! FIE 9114 CD; **David Jackson** *Fractal Bridge* (Fie! FIE 9113 CD) The CD reissue of **Loops & Reels** (Fie!) in 1993 served as a reminder (to those who needed reminding)

that Peter Hammill's compositional talents stretch beyond songcraft into studio tapework. **Sonix**, a similar collection (1994-96), includes film and dance commissions. Four soundtrack pieces for Michel Spinosa's *Emmene-moi* typify Hammill's distinctive feel for brooding, bittersweet melodies, encapsulated here by the violin and viola of Stuart Gordon. They all work splendidly as mood miniatures without the visuals. Elsewhere, 'Dark Matter' manipulates PH's free electric guitar playing, compressing it into a narrow dynamic band — interestingly recorded at a level lower than the ferocity of the playing would normally suggest. 'Four To The Floor' suffuses relentless pulse with peripheral voices and subtle distortions, while 'Exercise For Louis' evokes an eerie processional mood. Less appealing, without the dance troupe, that is, is the lengthy (26 mins) 'Labyrinthine Dreams', where fragile thematic material (a gentle play of cadences) is overstretched, and interspersed by polyrhythmic, MIDI piano player sections too obviously in the manner of Nancarrow and Reich. Even the brief 'song' sections seem laboured. Still, it's a stimulating and revealing collection, and Hammill does exceptionally well to bring an overall album-cohesion to the disparate strands of his instrumental work.

David Jackson's **Fractal Bridge** is the first non-Hammill album to be released on Peter Hammill's Fie! label. Beyond the small but dedicated PH/Van der Graaf fan-base Jackson is still an appallingly under-recognised saxophonist and flautist, who blends inspiration from jazz, rock and folk idioms with seamless ease. Soundbeam (see pp 36-41 in this issue for a detailed explanation) brings out the subtle gestures of his improvising; the emotional clarity of tone and cool elegance of phrasing (reminiscent of Jan Garbarek, especially on 'Ecco Soundbeam', 'Aloerotic' and 'Songerie') work poignantly within the shifting synthscapes and against the unpredictable rhythms and tone-clusters produced by his computerised partner. Repeat hearings reveal the depth of David Jackson's understanding of Soundbeam's sophistication and versatility. One of the most absorbing and convincing dialogues that I've heard between man and machine. Both Fie! releases come adorned with Paul Ridout's typically striking computer artwork. (*Fie! Records, 1 Walcot Gate, Bath, BA1 5UG, England*)

John Butcher *London & Cologne: Saxophone Solos* (Rastascan BRD 026 CD) A very welcome return to solo recording by the British saxophonist John Butcher, whose previous solo venture, **Thirteen Friendly Numbers** (Acta 1992), was greeted with unanimous acclaim. While that album's improvisations were conducted in the studio — several the result of intelligent multitracking — **London And Cologne** showcases Butcher's concert solo work. 'Some Kind Of Memory' for soprano, is surprisingly lyrical in parts, its ghostly, meandering 'theme' somewhat Debussian. Butcher transforms its line and texture with various inventive extended treatments, yet skilfully retains its fundamentally delicate character. This careful blend of imagination and control pervades the album. Never simply a parade of techniques and effects (still commonplace in solo improv), Butcher's journeys are always purposeful and to-the-point. Nothing here loses its way or outstays its welcome. A musical thread is perceived and then pursued with formidable concentration. The simultaneous high and low pitches of 'Schism' achieves an almost mediaeval-sounding polyphony, while 'Continuo 8' hovers on the edge of silence. 'Shrinkdown', the most outlandish and only studio recording, is real-time soprano played against four taped sopranos — squealing, spitting, bubbling in microtonal frenzy. Another major solo recording by one the most compelling saxophonists in improvised music. Any chance of a Butcher-Doneda album? Rastascan? Anybody? (*Rastascan Records, P.O. Box 3073, San Leandro, CA 94578-3073, USA*)

L'Orkestre des Pas Perdus *T'auras Pas Ta Pomme* (Ambiances Magnétiques AM040 CD); **Jean Derome et les Dangereux Zhoms** *Navré* (Ambiances Magnétiques AM038 CD) *T'auras Pas Ta Pomme* is about as straight-ahead a project as I've heard on the Ambiances label. A 6-piece brass outfit with drummer; sousaphone takes the bass figures and the jazz horns produce the marches, dance

themes, circus stuff. Occasional eccentric touches, like track 8, recall the anarchic fun and games of Goebbels & Harth's Soegenanntes Linksradikales Blasorchester, Loose Tubes, George Ricci & The Improverts

Jean Derome

or even Zappa's **Grand Wazoo**. Solid playing that swings like a bigger band, but not unruly enough for my ears to sustain too many hearings.

Navré is quite another proposition. Jean Derome (reeds, flute & piccolo) is one of the leading figures on the Québec new music scene and his 6-piece reflects the varied interests of this scene — improv, avant-rock, free jazz, chamber composition, etc. Like L'Orkestre des Pas Perdus, Dangereux Zhoms have a nifty sense of humour, but deploy it in circumstances where greater freedom from composed strictures is encouraged. Any group which sports a daxophone must have a twinkle in its eye, though René Lussier's exploits are less well known than Reichel's. On 'Anchive' the little beastie provides the perfect foil for Derome's Ornettish alto. 'Train Pour Nuremberg' cuts and thrusts between avant-rock and free jazz with shades of Henry Cow in Lussier's guitar and Derome's bassoon-like baritone exchanges. The themes (all by Derome) are suitably transparent and flexible enough to allow the improv to take hold and spread in many directions at once; 'Casse-Cou' rations its effervescent tune to sudden outbursts, imaginatively spaced against the lugubrious colours of the improv. Group cohesion is outstanding, making light work of complex eclecticism (akin to Curlew here); the other members are Pierre Cartier, Guillaume Dostaler, Pierre Tanguay and Tom Walsh. The more I hear it, the more I love it. (*Ambiances Magnétiques, CP 263 Succ. E, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H2T 3A7*)

Steve Beresford *Fish Of The Week* (Scatter 05 CD) Games are now a familiar part of improv (mainly courtesy of John Zorn); but do they stimulate improvisation, or just produce 'game-improv' where freedom is trammelled by the rules of the game. Sadly, the latter seems to be the case in this game-piece, based on fishy references (see the "fishnotes") and regulated by the sound of bicycle bells (The bells! The bells!) and "strategy cards", these being a signal to cause a sudden new pairing from the six improvisors — Alexander Balanescu, Clive Bell, Francine Luce, John Butcher, Mark Sanders, Steve Beresford. Yes, the names promise interesting work, though the frequent all-change policy prevents focused interaction happening (which is probably the point). Gestures tend to be embryonic, fast and furious, fragmentary, followed by an awkward pause after the bells ring and the new partners decide who they are. And some idiomatic insertions are ill-judged; Beresford neatly part-camouflages his, yet Luce's jazz balladry and Balanescu's melodies (his brief, skewed version of The Flintstones theme nearly sends the track into a kamikaze nosedive) seem at odds with the abstraction of Bell and Butcher. No doubt fun to play, but frustrating to listen to. (*Scatter, (0/2) 30 Carnarvon Street, Glasgow, G3 6HS, Scotland*)

AMM *AMM Live In Allentown USA* (Matchless MRCD 30 CD) The inner-sleeve picks out in bold type that David Ilic quote (actually it's an adapted Glen Sweeney quote first used by him to describe his own group Third Ear Band in 1969): **"With AMM, their albums are as alike or unalike as trees."** Most groups/individuals would be eager to deny any suggestion that their improvisations resemble each other, even if only in some general sense. Strangely, AMM seem particularly fond of this observation of their work and now display it with the frequency of a registered trademark. Perhaps it's come to that.

In his recent book, **No Sound Is Innocent**, Eddie Prévost advocates "making music, and listening to it, as if for the first time." Yet, AMM's (Prévost, Rowe, Tilbury) preoccupation

with monumental improvisations tends to suggest otherwise. **Allentown** consists of one hour-long piece, its predecessor **Newfoundland** (1992) of one 76-minute piece, and **Combine + Laminates** (1984) of one 44-minute piece. 'Allentown' again displays the trio's wonderful rapport, their attention to detail, their patient approach to the development of atmosphere, but there are several places where this piece could, *should* have ended, but the impulse to go on and create that grandiose statement seems irresistible. Unpredictable? Sort of, but on a now familiar scale. What's wrong with brevity? (*Matchless, 2 Shetlock's Cottages, Matching Tye, nr Harlow, Essex, CM17 0QR, England)*

Hal Rammel/John Corbett/Terri Kapsalis *Van's Peppy Syncopators* (Penumbra 003) The old-time cover photograph and the title imply a whimsical irony when applied to an album of abstract improv. Rammel (see piece in **Rubberneck 22**) and Corbett I'm familiar with, but Terri Kapsalis is a new violinist to me and her vivacious playing gives these dozen or so pieces an extra gritty edge. Although the primary focus is on timbre and texture an appealing kind of rickety charm and lyricism, even serenity, often emerges from the austere sounds; Corbett's guitar strings struck and plucked repeatedly until a rhythm of sorts appears; the unearthly pitchbend of Rammel's musical saw, as spooky as a Theremin. 'Fur-Lined Cup' has an almost oriental ambience, and a few tracks include spoken texts by Kapsalis — an uneasy, whimsical sarcasm when she juxtaposes images of tacky, celebratory plastic pigs with the thousands of memorial crosses for aborted foetuses on 'Lawn'. This is very sensitive acoustic improvising, which possesses peculiar emotional and atmospheric qualities. (*Penumbra Music, P.O. Box 282 Grafton, WI 53024, USA*)

Alquimia/Jose Luis Fernandez Ledesma *Dead Tongues* (ReR Megacorp ReR ALQ1 CD) After the fertile, polystylistic experimentalism of **Wings Of Perception** (AMP 1995) this is not the kind of follow-up I anticipated or hoped for from Alquimia. **Dead Tongues** is an uncomfortable hybrid of electroacoustic soundscaping, jazz, neo-prog rock/pop and traditional Mexican concerns. The opening synth pomposity is horribly reminiscent of an Alan Parker Project LP, while some of the vocal parts and rhythm tracks on 'Encinerada' sound like a possible Abba entry for the Eurovision Song Contest. The ambiguous textural layers that formed an essential part of the sound design for **Wings** have been pushed to the periphery on **Dead Tongues** which prioritises simple melody with variable rhythmic patterns. 'Xibalba' is the most coherent account of these disparate elements, propelled by Ledesma's percussive piano playing. Too eccentric for the mainstream, I fear, probably not eccentric enough to win over the hearts of experimental music devotees.

Joe McPhee/Evan Parker/ Daunik Lazro *McPhee/Parker/ Lazro* (Vand'Oeuvre 9610 CD) 1995 concert performances from the Nancy *Musique Action* festival recorded by François Dietz, who deserves a special mention here for the absolutely superb sound quality which brings the myriad nuances of these three reedsmen into the comfort of your listening room. Voerkel and Lovens used the word 'propinquity' to describe the tracks on **Goldberg** (Po Torch), and this word seems highly appropriate in describing the compelling closeness of interaction between McPhee (soprano, alto, pocket trumpet, alto clarinet), Parker (tenor and soprano) and Lazro (alto and baritone).

'The Emmet's Inch' at 37 mins has everything you'd expect from three cutting-edge improvisors, exploring the full palette of timbral colours and pitches in finely crafted interwoven lines that wriggle free in the blink of an eye. Especially beautiful are the phases when everybody's phrasing is flattened into slowly spreading, breathy drones. Solo space also opens up for each player, offering an opportunity to inspect the subtleties of different expressive vocabularies. There are two duets (Parker/McPhee; Parker/Lazro) followed by a second trio. The lasting impression is one of unity, and this evokes powerful emotions. Hard to believe that this was the first time they'd performed together as a trio. (*Vand'Oeuvre, B.P. 126, F-54504, Vandoeuvre-Les-Nancy Cedex, France*) **R**

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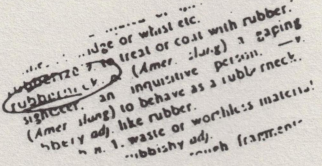

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